HORATIO NELSON

NELSON

1797

From a drawing made at Naples by Charles Grignon
(Royal United Services Institution)

HORATIO NELSON

BY

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AND

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FOREWORD

In the middle of London, one hundred and forty-two feet above the carcasses of four stuffed lions, the creations of the man who painted 'Dignity and Impudence,' stands the figure of a little man in a big hat. The pedestal is twenty-six times as big as the man, and when the hat is cleaned every five years thirty pounds of dirt are scraped off it. No one but steeple jacks has seen the man underneath since the workmen hauled him up there by pulleys on the fourth day of November, 1843.

The Ancients were wont to consign their heroes to the dizzy heights of Mount Olympus, high above the gaze of the common man who had to content himself with an effigy in the Pantheon. England has satisfied her people with a wax effigy of their hero in Westminster Abbey. He himself has been relegated by common consent to heights beyond the gaze of mortal man, and set upon a pedestal of which the stone one in Trafalgar Square is symbolic. Its architects have been his historians and his biographers; its materials, a mass of copy book platitudes mortared with a farrago of nautical jargon.

In raising Horatio, first Lord Nelson and Duke of

Bronte to a place where no one can possibly see what he looks like, the pedestals both concrete and abstract have adequately fulfilled their purpose. The vital facts of his life have been repeatedly omitted or distorted and the manner both of his living and of his dying have been successfully withheld. The whole English speaking world has been informed, with a wealth of meaningless but impressive technicalities, in scores of octavos, quartos, folios, monographs, pamphlets, treatises and broadsides, that have showered from the press at regular intervals for the last hundred years (not to mention at least three indifferent films and even a tolerably good one), of how he 'hauled up his mainsail astern' at St. Vincent, 'veered half a cable' at the Nile, 'weighed with a light and favourable wind' at Copenhagen, and 'formed line on the larboard tack' at Trafalgar. Four generations of patriotic readers have battled manfully with sloops, frigates, praams, cutters, brigs, polacres, snows, shallops, copper bottoms, ships of 98, 74's, 84's, and other cabbalastic numbers. They have withstood as well as might be the chain shot, cannister shot, grape shot, landridge shot and case shot fired at them by merciless and erudite writers. They have followed Lord Nelson over five of the seven seas in increasing bewilderment. It has been 'Eastward Ho to Trinidad and Westward Ho to Spain,' to borrow Sir Henry Newbolt's verse, with the lay student 'lagging all the way.' And by the time he has

waded through these multitudinous technicalities, the reader has completely forgotten to be interested in the man himself; which is, of course, exactly what the biographers intend.

But, above all else, a biographer must be amoral. Censorship – and particularly moral censorship – is in him the unpardonable sin. To judge the character of his subject is the height of presumption. When all is said, who is William Southey that he should pass judgment on Horatio Nelson?

Because of the squeamishness of writers and readers alike the true story of Horatio Nelson has been left untold. And in the upshot, the Nelson of their creation, while eminently suitable to address a Jamboree or distribute prizes at a school speech day, would have been quite incapable of commanding a fleet's obedience or a woman's affections. Yet it remains that he accomplished both – and more. And even as he could sail to victory after his enemies had deprived him of light and limb, so the great truth of his life withstands those friends who, in the interests of symmetry, have deprived him of what were perhaps his greatest victories.

For this pale-faced, neurotic son of a country parson was born to create at once a strategy that revolutionised naval warfare; and to taste Life in that fulness which takes no heed of the transitory conventions. 'The Nelson touch' reduced alike hearts of oak and hearts of flesh and blood. Urged by the volcano that burned within him he demanded

from Life: Colour, Triumph, Power and Passion. Had he been an Alexander, his wishes might have been fulfilled; but he lived in the England of the 1800's. His fourth great desire was denied him.

From the days when he was an unknown midshipman women had fascinated him. His career itself was largely the work of ladies' fingers. At the zenith of his fame he took the wife of an Ambassador for his mistress, and lived with her openly in her husband's house. He sought to enter society with her hanging on his arm. Society repulsed them; and Nelson reeled, bitter and disillusioned, from his first disaster. In his dismay he decided to die; and with a superb sense of the dramatic contrived to become the mark for a French bullet in a battle that was to seal the destiny of Europe.

Propriety slew him on his own quarter-deck. Since when a guilty Posterity has preferred to survey him through a telescope, and that telescope held to a blind eye. Except that by a freakish trick of chance, or it may be of Mr. Flaxman the sculptor, the eyes of the figure in Trafalgar Square are set gazing eternally over the roof of the Admiralty, across the seas, always in the direction of Naples. . . .

HORATIO NELSON

PART ONE

HORATIA WARD

From a drawing by John Jackson (F. Wellesley Collection)

CHAPTER I

HEARTS OF OAK

Sept. 1758 – *March* 1781

'Happy the man whose wish and care
His own paternal acres bound,
Content to breathe his native air
In his own ground.'
Alexander Pope.

It was still the golden age. Mr. Reynolds had just raised his price to twenty guineas a head. At the 'Cocoa Tree' *The Idler* was the latest literary sensation. Four tea merchants had been fined at Guildhall for 'colouring Bohea tea to resemble green tea, the colouring used said to be Dutch Pink.' Samuel Johnson was dining at the 'Mitre' for the first time with a long-faced Irishman named Burke. At St. Germains the haggard Old Pretender was at last breaking up; at St. Stephens, Lord Chesterfield was complaining of the 'pestilential vapour of the House of Commons.' Mr. Garrick was playing nightly to packed houses at Drury Lane; but Drury Lane's greatest prophet had not yet come – Sheridan was

seven and still in small clothes. The Province of Canada had just been won, the American Provinces were just about to be lost. Along the muddy country roads journeymen painters were touching up the inn signs of Admiral Vernon into a passable likeness of King Frederick of Prussia. The population of England was less than seven million souls. For the most part it paced monotonously to and fro at the hand looms or toiled wearily in bare open fields without hedges.

The fields undulated gently across England like a huge patchwork quilt of green and buff and brown, eastward, to the heavy waters of the North Sea. Tucked in a small fold of this quilt, three miles from where it came to an end in the northern Norfolk sand, a score of flint cottages with tiled roofs made the hamlet of Burnham Thorpe. All Saints Church, with a square, pinnacled tower, stood a little higher up the slope. No main road passed through this hollow and to reach it the carrier's cart from Burnham Market, on the road from King's Lynn to the sea, lumbered down between high banks of grass and cow parsley along a white track deep in dust in summer and foundrous with mud in the winter. The surrounding rises, closely cultivated, were bare to the sea winds; but in the hollow itself there were green-tufted trees, oaks, poplars and elms. The village lay low and was damp.

The rectory stood some way out of the village at

the edge of the turnpike, three-quarters of a mile from the church. At the back was the kitchen garden, with a paddock at the side and the thirty odd acres of glebe rising gently behind. The house was flint, and roofed with fluted tile like the other cottages in the village. It looked like two cottages built at right angles in the shape of an L. There were two stories in each wing and dormer windows in the roof. A row of elms lined the road in front, yew trees bounded the kitchen garden at the back. The trees made the downstairs rooms cold and gloomy.

Because of the wind, and the cold, and the damp house, the rector and his family were generally ailing. The Reverend Edmund Nelson, always of a weak and sickly constitution, made a habit of spending the winter away from his cure; and his fourth child, Horace, born on this 29th day of September, 1758, was so feeble that he was baptized privately ten days after he came into the world for fear he should, like three others in his family, die in infancy.

But Horace struggled through; to be baptized again seven weeks later on the 15th of November. They christened him the second time, despite his feeble sobbing, in the angular lead font of All Saints Church, while a wintry sunlight streamed through the high windows in the nave. His sponsors were Lord Walpole, patron of the living (Prince Pigmiggin, his clever cousin, the Horace of the letters,

called him), the Reverend Dr. Hammond, a neighbouring rector, and a lady called Mrs. Pyll.

Thus doubly fortified against the world, the flesh and the devil, the baby waxed strong enough for the somewhat effeminate name of Horace to be discarded in the fulness of time, for the more heroic Horatio. On his mother's side, he claimed kinship with Sir John Suckling the cavalier poet, and rubicund Sir Robert Walpole, the late Whig Prime Minister, whose sum of wisdom was to 'let sleeping dogs lie.'

His father's family came of a long line of rather uninteresting country parsons and stolid yeoman farmers. They had once risen to a Mayor of King's Lynn; but that was over a hundred years before and the feat never looked like being repeated.

Born of this somewhat colourless line into this remote and uneventful community, the infant Horace might well have become a typical Nelson. But there were strange forces at work. A biological trick threw back his nature behind the long row of parsons, and even the mayor, to the gay and reckless Sir John. Only four generations earlier Suckling had loved, and fought, and written his charming verse, and plotted, and fled to France, and drunk poison in a garret. His irrepressible spirit had not died with him. It had slept on in the family latent for a hundred and eleven years until it reawoke in this little spindle-legged fourth son of the Rector of Burnham Thorpe. And from these early days

at the parsonage, until that last hour in the cockpit of the *Victory*, the insatiable spirit of the poet never ceased to torment the neurotic nature in the feeble body it had chosen to inhabit.

Yet in these early Norfolk days, environment struggled against heredity. His father was an Evangelical after the manner of his time. On Sundays he denounced vice, in black stuff gown and bands, from his pulpit. On week-days he admonished his family for vanity amongst the calf-bound sermons of all his ancestors in his study. Nurse Blackett, according to her more simple philosophy, would tell the child tales of Shuck the black dog that ran after boys who spoilt their clothes on the Sabbath. While down in the village, the uncomplaining moon-faced yokels – last tame relics of the Norsemen, whose dragon ships had once aroused all Mercia – went stolidly to work, or to church, or to drink from their pewter pint pots. Good was good and evil was evil; and there was no mistake about it.

The Church was their citadel. To be christened, to attend Divine Service twice on Sundays, to be married, and to be buried, was the sum total of life. As soon as he was old enough to keep quiet through the service, Horatio became perforce the most regular and constant of churchgoers. By the time that he was seven he was signing the marriage register in a clear sloping hand as witness that Hannah Pinner and Peter Dennis, whose marks had been duly set in his presence, were pledged to

love, honour and obey. And many a Futter and an Ayer from the village took the immortal vows while over the rim of a box pew the round hazel eyes of the boy gazed at their faces as if trying to solve the secret of their mystical union. He stood up, he sat down, he knelt. He knew the services 'as by law established.' He was thoroughly versed in the Commination Service and the Order for the Burial of the Dead. He became outwardly a model rector's son, he absorbed the whole form of the established religion, yet with it all he never caught more than a glimmering of its true spirit. To the end of his days, fiery prayers and images of the Evangelical Jehovah flashed upon his consciousness at moments of crisis; but the prayers were jumbles of words, as meaningless as the oaths of less strictly brought up seamen and just as satisfying to the expression of his feelings; and his Jehovah was no more than a larger, if less tangible, version of the Reverend Edmund Nelson.

There was at one time a chance that his environment might prevail. If his mother had lived long enough she might have been able to interpret something of its meaning to her child. But Catherine Nelson was more delicate even than her husband and her life had been largely occupied in bearing his eleven children. She died when Horatio was nine. When his father repeated the bitterly familiar sentences over her mortal remains the boy's tears all unknowingly were running for the only human

being that might have saved him from himself. He never forgot the anniversary of her funeral.

With her death, his childhood ended. At nine he was already bordering on adolescence. Although his body was still weak and racked with the ague, an intense curiosity to know and to experience flamed through his being, linked with an almost feminine sensitiveness.

Coming through the glebe spinney on the top of the hill behind the Rectory he saw a carrion crow's nest in a poplar tree. He wanted to climb the tree and Nurse Blackett told him not to. He seemed to acquiesce – the lesson of obedience to his elders had been very thoroughly inculcated. Nevertheless, that same night, when the whole house slept, he climbed down from his bedroom window and made his way back to the spinney. As it was dark he could not find the tree and then, to make matters worse, he could not find his way home again. Next morning, he was found asleep on the leaves. The discipline of the nursery was breaking down. He was sent to school, where his new surroundings immediately emphasised his feminine characteristics.

Boys' schools in England have always been admirably provided for a conventionally accepted type of healthy savage that is as mythical as Rousseau's *Noble Savage*. In George V's time, boys are expected to enjoy organised games; in George III's time they were expected to enjoy unorganised ones. In the County Grammar Schools of 1769, after

Latin Grammar and ciphering had been flogged into the pupils by untidily wigged ushers ('Classic Jones,' Horatio's mentor at North Walsham was as 'arrant a Welshman as Rhys ap Griffiths and as keen a flogger as merciless Busby of birch-loving memory'), the boys were turned loose to scour the lanes and hedgerows or to pester the lives of unhappy village shopkeepers. Among the hobnailed ragamuffins that this type of education encouraged, Horatio found no common bond. Their very clothes – ribbed corduroy and coarse frieze – appalled him. They in their turn jeered at his carefully tended green jacket. His pet lamb was an object of particular scorn to his companions, whose own conceptions never rose above a hob ferret. But he was deeply attached to his lamb. He took it everywhere, and when it accidentally jammed its leg in the cobbler's door, he broke down and cried like a little girl.

His chief pastime was to make paper boats and launch them in the gutter water that ran down the middle of the street at Downham Market. Boats, even paper ones, represented all that was romantic and exciting; and the sea they sailed on was not only the boundary of the little world he lived in but the threshold of a greater one that contained fresh wonders, new experiences and stranger adventures. He could see it from the top of the hill behind the rectory, luring and inevitable: in fancy he could hear it as he lay awake on windy nights whenever

the shutters rattled. It called him as it had so often called other dwellers on that Norfolk coast.

At Burnham Thorpe all paths lead to the sea, but there is one in particular that strikes the imagination. It runs straight as an arrow downhill between a double row of trees, and though it stretches for over a mile the sea is always in sight. In the far distance the water shines in a pin point and a man who sets out to cover the path's dusty length can watch the speck of ocean grow as he walks, the grass verges stretching away to either side, the trees like an endless guard of honour drawn up in his presence. The path leads down to a dark fringe of pines out over an endless stretch of sand and down to the water's edge. The distance, the magnificent prospect and the loneliness are still terrific. They were stupendous in 1770. Upon the sea sailed the King's ships, low hulled, with billowing canvas, glittering in the sun or looming grimly against a stormy sky – bringing their visions of far away lands, of action, of the mystery of great waters. The ships sail still. And the path, straight, narrow and aloof, is still a reminder that the seaman's way is a lonely one. So much the boy Horatio may have dimly guessed even then; so much he was in very truth to learn in the later years.

* * * * *

The short December days of 1770 brought talk of war to the little hamlet of Burnham Thorpe. This time it was to be against the Spaniards. At the inn

they were discussing it with a banging of pewter pots on the oaken tables. All the young fishermen were running away inland for fear of the Press Gang from King's Lynn. The rector had gone on his annual visit to Bath and up at the rectory the two boys, Horatio and Maurice, had been left to amuse themselves as well as they could in a home that had somehow grown abnormally large since their mother's death.

In the absence of the Reverend Mr. Nelson, the weekly copy of the county newspaper, damp and bulky, lay undisturbed on a table, and in a last desperate effort to kill time they began to read the smudgy print together. Its pages, on the face of it, were no more attractive for them than usual, they only contained the advertisements and petty news of their immediate surroundings, but at the naval intelligence Horatio's eyes rounded. In that cramped print was news indeed. A new captain was appointed to the *Raisonnable*, a ship of 64 guns (evidently in anticipation of the war that was coming), and that captain was his uncle Maurice Suckling. A ship and his own uncle: it was a path to the sea. The boy decided that he would take it. At his earnest entreaty his brother Maurice wrote to Captain Suckling.

A reply came from Chatham:

'What has poor Horatio done who is so weak that above all the rest he should be sent to rough it at sea? But let him come; and the first time

we go into action a cannon ball may knock off his head and so provide for him. M.S.

December, 1770.'

* * * * *

Before it was properly light, on a bleak morning in the March of 1771, the London stage took up at Norwich among all the usual pieces of baggage, braces of pheasants, band boxes and carpet bags, the young Horatio Nelson and his father. As the guard's horn sounded and the wheelers broke into a trot and the heavy coach lumbered off, the boy knew that he was at last off to sea and that the telescopic life of men and women, as opposed to the microscopic life of the nursery and the schoolroom – was now fairly begun.

The regular ways of joining the navy in the tenth year of the reign of King George III were as a midshipman from the Royal Academy at Portsmouth after a two year's course, as a midshipman by influence or as a 'Captain's servant.' This last did not mean what it implied. It was merely a fictitious method of getting friends and relations into the service without the irritating requirements of the two year's course at Portsmouth. The custom had grown up with the British Navy about the time when King Alfred was inventing candle-clocks and burning cakes, and had become a distinct abuse by the days of the Spanish Armada, when the Lord High Admiral had discovered that there were so many 'captain's servants' on the

Queen's ships that there was scarcely any room for the crews. Accordingly, an Order in Council had limited this class to the proportion of two for every fifty members of the ship's company. No doubt captain's servants would have been abolished altogether but for the strong vested interest of the captains themselves. For they found the practice lucrative. The servant was entered on the pay roll and his wages furnished from the taxpayers' pocket; but the traditions of the service sanctioned their retention by the captain himself. In any event, boys of twelve had nothing to complain about – for they were lucky in escaping the necessity of using their brains at the Naval Academy at Portsmouth.

It was as a captain's servant that Horatio Nelson was eventually to enter the Royal Navy. For the moment he was actually signed on as a midshipman, which meant, in theory, that he was qualified to take up the duties of a petty officer, although it was generally understood that most midshipmen entering in this way came straight out of the nursery.

At London there were more farewells, and the boy was set upon the Rochester Stage, which took him across London Bridge, over Blackheath, up Shooters Hill and so through the narrow and crowded High Street at Rochester to the Bull Inn yard.

His Majesty's Ship *Raisonnable* had been captured from the French with its full crew of 630 in the channel in the year of Horatio's birth and now lay at anchor in the Medway, refitting for a campaign

against the Spaniards in the Falkland Islands. But Horatio, cold and forlorn, shivering from his perpetual ague, remained ignorant even of how to find her. Never was greatness embarked upon in a greater spirit of anti-climax. For three hours he wandered aimlessly up and down the streets, jostled by porters, seamen, fancy men, bumboat women and women of the town, until a passing officer felt sorry for him and asked what was the matter. With the help of his new friend he was at last dumped with his sea chest on the deck of the *Raisonnable*.

Never before or after was he so abjectly miserable. People were coming and going the whole time, but no one took the slightest notice of the slim figure with its oval, girlish face that leant against the taff-rail. The thin compressed lips betokened repression. The slightly lanterned jaws told of those cold, damp days in the rectory. The forehead, deep and broad, gave promise of power and decision. Brown soft eyes, like a spaniel's, were damp and far set with present sorrow. The chin – fatefully projecting – and the slightly drooping lower lip, hinted at fires, hardly smouldering yet, but to become insatiable and all-consuming in the fulness of time and manhood.

Captain Suckling had said that a ball might provide for him and in the absence of that missile nothing else did, least of all Captain Suckling, who was not even at Chatham. Horatio stayed on the

cold wind-swept deck for the whole of that night and the day following, not daring to venture below. Finally, in his own words, 'someone took compassion on him.' In such wise was he snatched out of a county schoolroom and introduced to the world of men and action. The action was varied to say the least of it.

* * * . * *

A ship in port carried a mixed company. Under the Regulations for the Naval Service, Order number Eleven ran:—

> 'All Commanders of His Majesty's Ships and vessels are strictly required to comply punctually with the Rule that no women be ever permitted to be on board but such as are really the wives of the men they come to and the ship not to be pestered too much even with them.'

Considerable latitude was exercised, however, in interpreting the word 'wife,' with the rather startling result that on most occasions the number of 'wives' on board a ship in port was greater than the number of 'husbands.'

It was the common practice when a ship touched shore for a host of boats to put off filled with women which hovered round her until permitted to come alongside. The men then went down with the boats to pick out their women 'as one would choose cattle.' The boatmen would be paid a shilling or two for the passage, and the 'wives,' after being examined at the gangway to see if they were so

abandoned as to be bringing spirits other than their own aboard, were allowed to go below deck, where in well-regulated ships the surgeon was required to examine them again. Once a ship's surgeon officially addressed the Lords Commissioners asking in his memorial 'whether it was the duty of a medical officer in his Majesty's Navy to examine prostitutes in order that the ship's company may gratify their passions.'

Between decks there were scenes to which Hogarth could scarcely have done justice. Cooped up in a large low room designed to hold at a pinch the six hundred men aboard, giving each one the regulation sixteen inches hammock room, a ship such as the *Raisonnable* would contain in addition to the usual crew, at a moderate estimate, four hundred women of the streets. Dirt, filth, and stench overwhelmed the crowded and congested atmosphere. Women screaming and quarrelling, men swearing and blaspheming, lay packed closer than sardines between the bulging hammocks. 'Show a leg!' 'Show a leg!' the bosun's traditional morning call, still survives as a reminder of those halycon days when his words in truth brought bare legs out of hammocks for inspection, that the females should be distinguished from the males, when all hands were piped on deck.

On Sundays, the female crew was paraded for inspection. The overseers in a Hampshire parish observed that they always provided for young

women likely to become burdensome by sending them to Portsmouth, whence they never returned; and, in one case, at least, a post captain was on his quarter deck with his wife one Sunday morning whilst seventy-eight prostitutes were being inspected by the first lieutenant to find out if their dress was free from bugs.

The officers themselves entertained visitors of this class and no midshipman could be screened (if indeed he wished to be) from such sights. In one instance a fifteen year old boy who had only joined the day before was thrust into bed with a prostitute by one of the lieutenants. 'When I joined my ship,' writes a fifth officer, 'the midshipmen had two prostitutes who messed in the berth with the young gentlemen and generally sat with them during the day. They remained in the ship until we sailed and on our return were again admitted.'

The effect on boys just joining their ships at an age when to-day they would be in the second form at a Preparatory School was to give them an outlook on life completely out of accord with all accepted notions of morality. 'We constantly find in a King's Ship,' says 'old surgeon,' writing his memoirs in 1824, 'young gentlemen who have been brought up with high principles, who from the state of the ships while refitting in harbour, are generally led into excess and debauchery. Indeed there are instances of young midshipmen who, after embarking in the Navy, commence a thoughtless and vicious

career which they pursue till they have been so diseased in body and mind that it was too late to save them. I have known several fine lads to die a miserable death from the facility afforded to them to persevere in their debauched habits. On shore a boy can retire from vice and avoid what is improper, but on board there is no retreat and he is compelled to live in the same habitation with the most notoriously infamous of the human species and in some classes of ships on the same deck with them.'

It was an abrupt change from Burnham Thorpe Rectory.

CHAPTER II

THE SHINING CARIBEES

March 1771 – *October* 1772

'Love thy country, wish it well,
Not with too intense a care;
'Tis enough that, when it fell
Thou its ruin didst not share.'
George Bubb Dodington.

THE year 1771 was the worst possible time for a boy to join a ship. The navy of Drake and Raleigh had not quite passed away; the navy of Collingwood and St. Vincent had not yet fully evolved. Ashore, new machines were pounding in the Industrial Revolution, afloat, scientific tactics and navigation were demanding a vast supply of men for which the established frame-work was miserably unprepared.

To maintain the necessary establishment of seventy thousand men was beyond the wit of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty. When young Nelson joined the *Raisonnable*, bounties of thirty shillings a head were being paid by the

Government and twenty-one shillings by his native King's Lynn, to every able seaman who would volunteer. But they failed to induce. The population of England was curiously indifferent to the attractions of a life on the ocean wave. It was quite easy to strike up a chorus 'who are so free as the sons of the waves?' in a tap room when the Press Gang was not in the offing; but life on a man-of-war was too well-known a reality to suffer the survival of any romantic notions.

Impressment increased. Ruffians with cudgels were to be seen lounging about the streets 'incessantly vomiting out oaths and horrid curses.' They were the King's Press, led by discredited naval officers (Yellow Admirals!), armed with the Press Warrant requiring every male adult to show by what right he remained at large – a roving Writ of *Quo Warranto*. They lay in wait for convicts at the jail door, for paid-off merchant seamen at the dock, for unwary loungers in the taverns, for careless apprentices strolling down Thames Street, and even for the miserable ploughman homeward wending his weary way along the lane.

Officers could not be found by such ready means. Most of them had been sent to sea by stern parents to break their youthful insubordination. Whatever their birth they became the most uncouth sea monsters by their training. At the rank of Captain the notorious Jack Punch could not write his name. And so strong was nepotism and favouritism that

Lord Rodney could promote a midshipman through all the ranks to post-captain in one month and four days when the boy was only fifteen.

The service was essentially a family affair and all captains could do much as they pleased with appointments. Nelson's path was made easy from the first and his uncle saw that he should have as much interest and variety as possible. None the less, before eighteen months were out the boy had an 'utter horror of the Royal Navy.' He went up the Thames with the pilot; he went on a polar expedition; he went to the East 'from Bengal to Bussora.' The only result was that his constitution was finally wrecked and but for the consideration that Captain Suckling's nephew received he would have died on the voyage. As it was, he was invalided home and returned to England at eighteen, yellow, shrunken and liverish, like a retired Company's Nabob.

He had grown no happier and he had got no further. He wished himself overboard. He had been sea-sick in the South Atlantic, the Arctic, the North Sea, the Indian Ocean and the English Channel. The old depression of his childhood descended upon him like a cloud. 'I felt impressed with the idea that I should never rise in my profession. I could discover no means of reaching the object of my ambition.'

But an inordinate vanity was beginning to colour everything he wrote or said or saw. The American

Colonies had just revolted and after a decade of peace people were again talking about exploits and heroes. 'I will be a hero,' he said, 'and I will brave every danger!' Then, with a touch of the Burnham Thorpe atmosphere he added sententiously, 'confiding in Providence!' On his next ship he noted and recorded with much pleasure, 'although my age might have been sufficient cause for not entrusting me with the charge of a watch yet Captain Robinson used to say he felt as easy when I was on deck as any officer in the ship.'

On the eighth of April, 1777, he was commissioned as second lieutenant of the *Lowestoft* frigate, Captain William Locker, then fitting out for Jamaica.

The second British Empire was yet in its making; the first was still in being. But George Washington had already squeezed the British garrison out of Boston, and Lord North's Government had more to weep over than spilt tea. In the West Indies American privateers and French adventurers sailing under the famous rattlesnake on a yellow field with the motto 'Don't tread on me' were harrying the shipping between the islands and slipping through with arms and uniforms for the rebel levies. Once again the channels through which the treasure fleets and the buccaneers had steered their courses were echoing to the bark of little brass guns.

Off the palm-fringed shores of Hispaniola his vanity could have full play and his depression no

time to show its face. 'Blowing a gale of wind and a very heavy sea the frigate captured an American letter of marque. The first lieutenant was ordered to board her, which he did not do owing to the very heavy sea. On his return the captain said "Have I no officer in the ship who can board the prize?" when I said "It is my turn now." This little incident has often occurred to my mind and I know it is my disposition that difficulties and dangers do but increase my desire of attempting them.'

He was delighted with everything that happened, from a jar of sweetmeats sent by a friend to a search for compromising papers on a French trader which, after a two days' search, he at last found in an old shoe.

On the eighth of December, 1778, he got his own ship; it was the brig *Badger*, and he was just twenty. His finances began to show an immediate improvement.

Prize money was still the gilded incentive to a naval career. Drake and Hawkins had waylaid the Plate fleets in these very waters where King George's navy was finding a less brilliant but equally solid substitute. For among the many islands scattered in the Spanish Main were the supply dumps which enterprising merchants of the old world had set up to feed and provide the confederate states of the new. In and out between the palm trees the tall ships were always coming and

going for George Washington. Under the tolerant folds of 'neutral' flags were piled uniforms (blue and buff), bandoliers, knapsacks, boots, woollens, yarns, cottons, nails, hatchets, flour, pork, grain, sugar, fruits, puncheons of gin and brandy, kegs of rum, and stacks of those rifles which having fired their fill for the beautiful eyes of the Pompadour on the field of Rosbach had been shipped by a thrifty nation to discharge their shot for Independence. It was none other than M. de Beaumarchais, author of the *Marriage of Figaro*, who had shipped them; it was the young Marquis de Lafayette who was to receive them; it was Horatio Nelson who was after them. 'We took four sail for which I shall share about eight hundred pounds sterling,' he writes from the *Badger*. And again, 'Lambert is going home. I have sent a cask or two of shaddocks by him, and Mr. Taylor sends to him this day that if convenient to take two casks of old rum for you.'

But all his exertions could not stop the war from going badly. 'The increasing frenzy of His Majesty's unhappy and deluded people on the other side of the Atlantic' was supported by France in 1778, and then by Spain and Holland in the two following years. On the mainland the war bounced from New England to the Gulf of Mexico; at sea four fleets were now leagued against one. In such times promotion came quickly, and he was post-captain at twenty-one. Simultaneously, the Governor-General of Jamaica had an idea.

Its simplicity was comparable only to its magnitude. Two entire continents were involved and those calculations so dear to the military mind had ample scope. A small mobile force striking from a point A on the Atlantic coast of Central America and marching in a westerly direction should, given the requisite nature of the terrain and the necessary tactical situation, be able to establish itself at a point B on the Pacific; and having entrenched its line of communication would find itself cutting the Spanish Dominions of South America from all communication with those north of the isthmus. As there never had been any communication between the Spanish Dominions in South America and those north of the isthmus the value of the project was obscure. Moreover, the bearing of such an operation on the pacification of the revolting colonists was obscurer still.

The Castle of San Juan, lying seventy miles up the river of that name, was point A, the first objective, and Captain Nelson was given command of the sea forces as it was to be a combined operation.

But when Nelson anchored in the mouth of the San Juan river where he was to hand over to Major Polson there was 'not a man who had ever been up the river or had any idea of the distance of any fortification from its mouth' and in the general helplessness he decided to go with the expedition up the San Juan himself. Eighteen hundred men

pushed off in two of the ship's boats and a flotilla of native canoes. The pushing was literal, because the river was shallow; and the tactical situation was most unfavourable. As for the nature of the terrain, it was a fever-ridden swamp and an impossible tangle of tropical forest. The men were scorched by the sun, suffocated by the trees, smitten by fever, bitten by snakes and spiders. The first enemy outpost, a battery of swivel guns on an island, manned by a dozen Spanish artillerymen was 'boarded' by Nelson at the head of his sailors; and two days later, having pushed on up stream, the advance was abruptly checked at the Castle of San Juan.

Nelson once again urged an immediate assault. But Major Polson was in command. The drill book said there should be a siege, and siege there was. Had the conduct of the operations been entrusted to a certain ensign of the 79th called John Moore things might have gone differently, but the weary trail to Coruna was many years away.

For thirteen days they sapped and mined and threw up earth works. But the charges spluttered ineffectively under the steady downpour of a tropic rain, and the earth works were washed into the river. 'Major Polson will tell you of my exertions,' Nelson wrote; 'I made batteries and afterwards manned them.'

At last the castle fell. It was a crumbling, dank, fever-ridden place full of putrefying hides. Men died

by platoons and their bodies were wearily heaved into the river until, when there was no life left in the expedition and it was impossible to move any farther, the three hundred and eighty who were left of the original eighteen hundred drifted back to the sea-shore. Of Nelson's crew of two hundred, only ten men shattered in mind or body were left, and their captain could last it out no longer. One Cuthbert Collingwood, a man of thirty (Nelson had become acquainted with him on the *Lowestoft*), took over his ship and he himself, the poison running through his system, sailed eastward, having altogether lost the use of his left arm and very nearly that of his left leg and thigh as well.

And so on a calm autumn day two months after, a spidery postchaise jolted a young man in naval uniform, his face prematurely lined, his body gaunt and shrunken, into the quiet town of Bath.

Bath, with its white stone terraces and formal walks, was, for all its invalids and half pay officers, essentially the charming city of pleasure over which the great Beau Nash had presided not so very many years before, but Nelson was in no state of mind or body to appreciate it. If a wounded naval officer could be a great attraction in the Pump Room or at the Assembly, a diseased one, smitten with all the fluxes and fevers of Darien, was only a nuisance. So sick did he lie there that they had to carry him to and from his cot. Three times a day they made him drink the waters and every other

night they bathed him ceremoniously like a baby. In the city where Captain Absolute was wooing Lydia Languish on the North Parade and Katherine Morland flirted with Mr. Tilney in the Pump Room, Horatio Nelson, who would have entered into such little affairs with as high a zest as any and an energy greater than most, was left alone to draw such comfort as he could from his own personal perfections. 'Dr. Woodward says he never had a better patient,' he said.

With the February rains he was well enough to take an interest in 'Mr. Rigaud's portrait of myself'; but an England now struggling less for Empire than existence could not leave a good officer for one moment more than was necessary to recuperate in the comfortable Somersetshire town, set in its cup among the Mendip hills, that was 'like Jamaica to any other part of England.'

He was dragged almost straight from his bed for foreign service in the *Albemarle*, and that in the Baltic.

All the long dreary winter that followed on the surrender of Britain's last hope in the American Colonies ('it is all over now,' cried Lord North, who took the news as he would a musket ball), Nelson kept station off Jutland, while the mists now shrouded, now revealed the green copper roofs of Castle Kronborg where Hamlet had watched and mused.

And the young captain's meditations were no

happier. Old wounds were aching, the old gloom was back. Even his family were conspiring to annoy him. His brother William wanted to go to sea as a chaplain and wrote to say so. Nelson, who had seen some sea chaplains, was insistent that he should not. 'The more I see of chaplains of men-of-war, the more I dread seeing my brother in such a disagreeable station of life.' He hoped that after his admonitions his brother had 'lost all idea of going to sea.'

Then he was ordered with a convoy to Quebec, 'where worse than all, most maddening of all to tell, I am to winter.' Even the damp chill of Denmark was better than the bitter cold of Canada. To be isolated from home, friends, the society of women, and that when the war was lost already, 'could anything be more damnable?' Small wonder he 'wanted much to get from that confounded voyage.'

But the voyage, after all, was to bring its compensations. And of the kind to which Nelson was peculiarly susceptible. While his ship lay like a midget in the great pool of the St. Lawrence under the heavy face of Castle Frontenac, her captain found an American girl to divert him during his many vacuous hours ashore. That fall their relationship became very close. There were ice floes in the St. Lawrence; sheets of ice made it an agony for the wretched fore-top-men to scramble up and down the icy masts; but the captain was all on fire. The voyage he had so much dreaded

had brought him not to Quebec but to Paradise.

Orders came in the middle of October for the *Albemarle* to sail to New York, the last town in the American colonies that was still held by a British Army. Good-byes were said. The sailors' doxies were sent ashore. Nelson and his officers went aboard. They were to be ready to sail next morning. – 'A very pretty job at this late season, with our sails frozen to the yards' as one of them grumbled.

But next morning a Mr. Alexander Davison (a very prosperous contractor whose methods were to land him eventually in Newgate), going for his constitutional along the beach, was amazed to see the captain's gig pulling shorewards. Nelson landed without a word. 'What can have brought you back, sir?' the contractor asked.

'Walk up to your house and you shall be acquainted with the cause – it is impossible for me to leave this place without again waiting on her who has so much added to its charms and laying myself at her feet.'

Davison knew perfectly well who 'she' was – all Quebec knew that, as well as it knew 'her' character; and Davison was aghast. 'Your utter ruin as you are at present must inevitably follow' screamed the voice of experience and maturity.

'Then let it follow,' thundered the young Captain who never liked being contradicted, 'I am resolved to do it.'

'And I positively declare that you shan't . . .'

* * * * *

The *Albemarle* actually sailed on the 20th; and Nelson sailed in her. His career and his character were saved.

* * * * *

At New York was Prince William Henry, afterwards William the Fourth of England, then a midshipman on the British flagship. The Royal Duke was introduced to the brilliant and conscientious young Captain of the *Albemarle* by Lord Hood when Nelson came on board to visit the Admiral. The young man who had just been swearing that he would throw up his career for the sake of his light-o'-love was still distrait in his appearance. He wore a full-laced uniform and an old fashioned waistcoat with long flaps, with lank, unpowdered hair tied in a stiff Hessian tail 'of extraordinary length.' The Duke had never seen anything like it and before the introduction took place could not imagine who the stranger was and what he had come about. After it, he seemed to him the merest boy of a Captain he had ever seen.

CHAPTER III

TRUE HONOUR PREDOMINATES

November 1772 – *February* 1785

'Stay, stay, ye greedy merchants, stay,
Send not your ships so fast away.'
Thomas Hughes.

Nelson, Lord Hood and the future William the Fourth sailed from Sandy Hook with twelve ships in November, 1782, for the West Indies. The young captain delighted to be in such illustrious company was fulsome in his praise of the Royal midshipman. He actually discovered in that not over brilliant personality 'an ornament of the service'; 'a *disciplinarian* and a strong one'; 'a *seaman*'; 'with the best temper and great good sense'; – so perfect in fact that 'every other qualification you may expect from him.' It was the only testimonial poor King Billy ever got.

Apart from his company Nelson found the voyage unlucky. Although he took seven prizes

he could not get one into port and his only independent command resulted in a definite reverse.

Early in the spring he heard that Turks Island had been taken by the French. He decided to attack with such ships as were available and sailed up to the island at sunset on the evening of Friday, March 6th, 1783. A boat was put off with a flag of truce demanding surrender by dawn, while Nelson and his officers sat down to dinner in the after cabin.

But somehow conditions failed to accommodate themselves to the Nelson touch. Events fatally hung fire, and instead of the expected atmosphere of enthusiastic co-operation there came only a sense of irritation, inefficiency and flatness.

The French commander refused his cue. Day broke and there was no surrender. No one was ready with the next move. One of the four ships had dragged its anchors in the night and could not be found. A landing party was laboriously collected from a deficient supply (the crews of the three remaining ships were correspondingly weakened) and, such as it was, was held up at once by the garrison. After three hours the officer commanding asked for a diversion from the sea, whereupon the *Albemarle* and her two consorts sailed round the point of the harbour to bombard the town, whereat, 'I was very much surprised to see a battery of three guns open upon them.' For a full hour the battery fired at the ships and the ships fired at the battery.

No one was much the worse, but as it was rather easier to aim accurately on shore that on a pitching ship the battery got the better of it and wounded six men on the ships. Meanwhile the landing party had observed that 'the troops were waiting to receive them with several field pieces and had a post on a hill with two pieces of cannon;' and so, after considering fully the size of the garrison and the position it had fortified, Nelson 'did not think that anything further could be attempted.'

At the end of June the *Albemarle* arrived at a Portsmouth that was no encouraging place for men to return to after all their tossing about into various climates. The town was more squalid and tawdry than ever. Poverty had followed defeat. Lean concubines in garish rags lounged along its grass-grown pavements and hung in groups round the crowds that listened to the daily auctions of furniture. The coffee houses were empty, and there was no one save the coachman and the guard on the 'dillys' and stages that went in and out of the town. There was fear of trouble. The triumph of rebellion in America had made the seamen mutinous, and Nelson was justifiably flattered by the behaviour of his own ship's company who, 'in these turbulent times,' offered 'if I could get a ship to enter for her immediately.' Unfortunately, good captains could never keep track of the floating populations that passed through their ships and were forced to cajole, entice and impress again,

each time they took a new command. So Captain Nelson could only wrap himself up in his 'iron-bound coat,' catch the empty stage to London, and spend day after day pestering the Navy Office in Whitehall for the wages of the men in the *Albemarle* to the annoyance of Mr. Alexander Davison who was waiting to talk over old amours in Lincoln's Inn Hall.

Nelson took lodgings off the Strand. Lord Hood carried him off to be presented at St. James's Palace. The King, he told Captain Locker, was exceedingly attentive: but he confessed to his brother William that the 'damned attendance at St. James's' had given him a cold. While it was still on him he must needs drive down to Windsor Castle to say good-bye to young Prince William, who was setting off for the Continent.

When he got back to his lodgings he had to worry his head over forty gallons of rum which had been sent to Captain Locker in the Maidstone stage waggon by mistake, and the climax of it all was that he had to go to bed for a fortnight.

By the end of July, however, he was well enough to go to his uncle, William Suckling, at Kentish Town 'to breathe a little fresh air,' although he still worried over some 'segars' which ought to have reached Captain Locker and somehow had not. He was so much himself again that he could write 'I believe there is not a speck in my character;' and then (the little affair in Quebec having apparently

been quite forgotten), 'True honour, I hope, predominates in my mind.'

At last, on August 20th, 1783, he booked a place in the Lynn coach and reached Burnham Rectory that night. The Reverend Edmund Nelson was grown frailer and less terrible; otherwise everything was just the same in the dark damp parsonage house among the elm trees. In the fields the corn was being reaped by rows of dull men in smock frocks. The apples were ripening in the glebe orchard. Coveys of partridges were flying up from the early stubble. The whole involved and humdrum life of Burnham was going placidly on. It was still going placidly on when he left in October; altogether unconscious of the stormy bird of passage that had, for a short space, come back to its own. Rested and recovered, he wanted new experiences, and as this was peace time and he was on half pay, he decided to visit France.

He sailed with a friend from Dover by the seven a.m. packet on October 23rd, and breakfasted at half-past ten in Calais. Everything was exciting. He was highly diverted with 'looking what a curious figure the postillions in their jack boots and rats of horses made together.' The chaises had no springs, and the roads were paved like London streets. 'They told us we travelled poste, but I am sure we did not get on more than four miles an hour.' He slept on a straw bed, in dirty sheets, and supped off a pigeon upon a dirty cloth, with a wooden-handled

knife. 'Oh, what a transition from happy England!' Finally, he reached St. Omer, 'a large city, with well paved good streets and well lighted.'

In that compact whitewashed little town, sprinkled with its gigantic and ruinous stone churches, he soon found what he was looking for. 'There are two very agreeable young ladies, one always makes our breakfast and the other our tea . . . they spend the evening with us . . .' There was also an English clergyman, 'a Mr. Andrews,' who had 'two very beautiful young ladies . . . daughters.'

Within a month his time was very full, too full to finish off a letter to his brother William at any great length, for he was 'engaged to spend the evening with the most accomplished woman my eyes ever beheld'; and 'when a lady is in the case all other things must give place.'

Half pay evidently was not enough for the demands of so many ladies – for he had recourse to 'six or seven halves of tickets in the Irish lottery . . .' thinking that perhaps 'something might turn up by having a number of chances.'

By Christmas he had actually determined to marry Miss Andrews. 'Had I a million of money, I am sure I should at this moment make her an offer of them.' That he probably would – he was always extremely generous; but his income at the time was not more than £130 a year. He wrote at once to his uncle at Kentish Town that the critical moment of his life had arrived.

'Whether I am to be happy or miserable depends solely on you . . . now I must come to the point. . . . Will you, if I should marry, allow me yearly a hundred pounds until my income is increased to that sum . . . you must excuse the freedom . . . life is not worth preserving without happiness and I care not where I may linger out a miserable existence. I pray you may never know the pangs which at this instant tear my heart.'

Unfortunately, Miss Andrews refused the prospect of such future glory with so much else beside, and Nelson abruptly broke off his stay at St. Omer.

Back at his old lodgings off the Strand, he again caught a loyal cold at St. James's Palace, talked to Lord Hood about the latter's chances against that perfidious radical, Mr. Charles James Fox, at the forthcoming Westminster election, and paid a flying visit to his father then on his annual pilgrimage to Bath. His future was uncertain. He thought of returning to France ('to learn the language only, I hate their country and their manners'), but the associations of that journey were still melancholy, 'since I go to many charming women, but no charming woman will go with me.' He was also minded to buy a horse and winter at Burnham. But all uncertainty was suddenly ended by an unlooked-for command.

In March, 1784, he was appointed to the twenty-eight gun frigate *Boreas*, bound for the West Indies and 'full of young midshipmen.' There were also

orders to take out Lady Hughes and her daughter (her husband was an Admiral and commanded the West Indies station). 'A very modest request, I think, but I cannot refuse so must put up with the inconvenience and expense.'

He took over at Woolwich and before he could get to sea he had worse inconveniences even than Lady Hughes to suffer. 'The damned pilot – it makes me swear to think of it – ran the ship aground where she lay with so little water that the people could walk round her till next water. That night and part of the next day we lay below the Nore with a hard gale of wind and snow. On Wednesday I got into a quarrel with a Dutch Indiaman. The Dutchman has made a complaint against me.'

At Portsmouth he went ashore to seek company more congenial than that of Lady Hughes. But while he was riding a 'blackguard horse' on the common the animal bolted, and carried him off all round the forts, right through the town and out at the gate into a lane blocked by a wagon. To prevent his legs being crushed he threw himself off on to a heap of flints ('it was a thousand to one that I had not been killed') and, what made it worse, 'a young girl was riding with me.' Her horse also ran away, but was saved by a gallant young man who caught at its bridle in the nick of time.

The whole voyage of the *Boreas*, with Lady Hughes's family aboard (to say nothing of all the

midshipmen and Mr. William Nelson who had come along as ship's chaplain with all his canonicals and sermons) was a sore trial to anybody's temper. In his exasperation, Nelson made a list of 'the thirty-three different people walking my quarter deck on the evening of 30th of May' and he found them all 'an incredible expense' to him.

At the end of September they at last anchored in English Harbour, Antigua, a congested and pestilential spot shut in by lofty wooded hills that held the damp in the rainy season. The island lacked fresh water and the rain-water tanks provided for the ships stagnated and putrefied all the summer.

It was altogether too much for the Reverend William, who returned within a week, always saving the fact that his brother undertook to keep him upon the books for the purpose of his pay as long as he could.

Nelson was probably no more sorry to lose him than he was to bid farewell 'to that fine talkative Lady Hughes,' for he was beginning to take comfort in the company of the Commissioner's wife, though he was on very bad terms with the Commissioner.

Two days after the arrival of the *Boreas*, Nelson had discovered that were it not for Mrs. Moutray, 'who is very good to me,' he would have almost hanged himself in the infernal hole. The hot weather killed several of his crew and local society

was intolerable, particularly Sir Richard Hughes', for that gentleman was always bowing and scraping, and his wife's 'eternal clack' was no less trying ashore than it had been at sea. Although Nelson was senior captain on the station, no one ever called on him and he 'never set foot in any house.' His friendship with a married woman hardly improved matters.

Besides, he was a High Tory, while the islanders sympathised strongly with the American colonists to whom they were bound by ties of sympathy and commerce. Although the presence of an English squadron had prevented their sympathy from taking an active form in the late war, it was neither easy nor profitable for them to forget old associations, and American traders still came and went among the islands as though the Declaration of Independence and the siege of Yorktown had never been.

Such commerce was a flagrant breach of the Navigation Acts which, since the time of Cromwell, had confirmed the right to trade with British possessions to British ships. But the West Indian islanders were not prepared to pay so highly for their loyalty, especially as the fact that the American ships were originally registered as British before the rebellion gave a specious cloak to this illicit intercourse. Everyone from Sir Richard Hughes downwards was prepared to connive at this pretence rather than make life unpleasant.

Nelson had not been in the West Indies three

months before he determined 'not to suffer the Yankees to come where my ship is.' He was quite impervious to all local susceptibilities. 'The residents of these islands,' he said, 'are inimical to Great Britain and as great rebels as ever were in America, had they the power to show it.'

The President and Council of the islands, thoroughly put out by such awkward views coming from the senior captain on the station, appealed to the Governor-General and to Sir Richard Hughes for an order to the squadron to admit American vessels.

Nelson replied that so long as he was captain of a British man-of-war he would never allow himself to be subservient to any Governor in doing illegal acts, and waited on Sir Richard Hughes to ask him whether or not it was his duty to enforce the Acts.

The Admiral, who was 'a great ninny,' said nobody had ever sent him any Acts. Nelson answered that he would find the Navigation Acts included in those Statutes of Admiralty which were issued to all commanding officers.

Sir Richard had never seen such a volume. Nelson showed him a copy.

As for the Governor, Major-General Sir Thomas Shirley, he was 'not in the habit of taking advice from young gentlemen.'

'I am as old as the Prime Minister of England,' replied the twenty-eight year old captain, 'and think myself as capable of commanding one of his

Majesty's ships as that Minister is of governing the State.'

Nelson acted on his words and when the *Boreas* arrived at St. Kitt's ordered all American vessels to put to sea within forty-eight hours. The crews were amazed, the inhabitants indignant, but the ships sailed.

There was a sensation. The wretched Sir Richard Hughes (whose talkative wife was by no means the only person who was now talking at him), wrote in a paternal style to the young captain about the wisdom inherent in the adage of letting sleeping dogs lie and the propriety of being guided by the wishes of the Presidents and Councils, and followed it up by saying that 'he had now obtained good advice upon the point and that the question about the admission or non-admission of American ships was one for the discretion of the Governor.'

Major-General Shirley decided that the ships should come in and informed Nelson that 'the Admiral having submitted the matter to him, he chose to admit American vessels.'

Nelson was the best hated man in all the West Indies. 'One sends me a challenge, another laws me, but I keep them all off.' He 'respectfully declined to obey the Admiral's orders,' and Sir Richard determined to hail him before a Court Martial for insubordination. But whatever might be the opinion among landsmen there was only one view aboard the King's ships and it was

discreetly hinted to Sir Richard that no properly constituted Naval Court was likely to find against the officer commanding *Boreas*. For Nelson also had his friends. The Governor of Nevis, unlike his colleagues, believed his action to be right and said so. Captain Collingwood encouraged him with his advice and energy. And his ship's company, especially the high-spirited midshipmen, were inclined if anything to be over zealous in their loathing for the Yankees.

Thus supported, Nelson proclaimed that all foreign vessels in harbour after a given date would be seized and dealt with as prizes and followed it up by himself apprehending four American ships and their cargoes off the island of Nevis.

Subscription lists were at once opened on behalf of the shipmasters through all the islands to enable them to defend their case in the Admiralty Court. Meanwhile the four American captains counter-attacked by issuing writs against the captain of the *Boreas* for £40,000 damages for false imprisonment.

Nelson could not venture on shore for fear of being served with their writs and forcibly detained to stand his trial. Once taken, he could never have found the necessary bail and the verdict of an island jury would undoubtedly have gone against him for the full amount.

Efforts to serve the writs on him on his ship were futile, but the merchants were at least confident that he would never dare venture ashore to give

evidence in the Court of Admiralty, and without his evidence the prizes were hardly likely to be condemned.

The Judge, however, knew his duty. On the day of the trial he issued a safe conduct; and Nelson landed and marched into court through an ugly mob. The merchants tried hard to persuade the Marshal to seize their enemy promising that they would amply indemnify him for any unpleasant consequences. The Judge announced that if the Marshal dared to do anything of the kind he would certainly go to prison for contempt. Between the Judge and the merchants the Marshal did nothing; and all four ships were condemned as lawful prize.

When the news reached England the Government, delighted with the outcome, stirred suddenly to action and conveyed his Majesty's grateful thanks for his rigid attention to duty to – Admiral Sir Richard Hughes!

CHAPTER IV

DEAREST FANNY

February 1785 – *March* 1787

'Love not me . . .
. . . for any outward part,
No, nor for a constant heart,
For these may fail or turn to ill.'

Anon.

In February, 1785, Mr. Commissioner Moutray, of Antigua, decided that it would be as well to take his wife back to England. Nelson was utterly disconsolate. 'My dear sweet friend is going home, her equal I never saw in any country or in any situation. What an example to take pattern from,' he lamented. Yet while the time for her departure was still some way off he could still distract his mind with all the other little love affairs of the station, of which he delighted to write fully to his brother William. But one luckless day the Muster Master checked brother William as having been absent with leave since the first of October, so that Nelson had to confess himself 'not quite certain about the paying you; nor can I help it.'

After that troublesome affair was finally out of the way he went to examine some lands for his friend Captain Locker and found that the house was ruined and the estate overgrown. 'If you claim it,' he wrote, 'the taxes are far more than it is worth.'

But when the time at last grew nearer for his only friend on the island to sail for England the confidence that could brave the enmity of all the islands broke down and he became again the nervous, sensitive boy who had been so miserable on the *Raisonnable*. 'My sweet friend. What a treasure of a woman! God bless her!'

At last – it was the 21st of March – she sailed and he threw all restraint away. 'The country appears now intolerable, my dear friend being absent. It is barren indeed. English Harbour I hate the sight of. I went once up the hill to look at the spot where I spent more happy days than in any other one spot in the world. Even the trees drooped their heads and the tamarind tree died. All was melancholy. The road is covered with thistles – let them grow. I shall never pull one of them up. By this time I hope she is safe in old England. Heaven's choicest blessing go with her.'

Unknown to Mr. Moutray, there also went with her a sketch of the Captain of the *Boreas* and some verses from Captain Collingwood to whom (as a biographer has phrased it) she appears to have exercised 'the greatest kindness.':

To you belongs the wond'rous art
To shed around you pleasure;
New worth to best of things impart
And make of trifles treasure.

On the island of Nevis, meanwhile, there had been living a young widow named Frances Herbert Nisbet. Her husband, a doctor, had died in a lunatic asylum eighteen months after their marriage and left her with a little boy called Josiah. Mrs. Nisbet had heard a great deal about the seizure of American ships, of a probable Admiralty suit, and much to do concerning a young captain called Nelson. Unlike most residents in the island she heard of him in a favourable light as she was living with her uncle, Mr. Herbert, that Governor who had so annoyed his colleagues by taking Nelson's part against everybody else.

Nelson was a distinct curiosity in the humdrum life of a small community and Fanny Nisbet was attracted to curiosities. She was particularly anxious to learn all she could about the brilliant young officer, and long before the culmination of the Prize Court action, she had most tantalising intelligence from a young girl friend that increased her curiosity to meet him.

'We have at last,' the lady wrote, 'seen the little captain of the *Boreas* of whom so much has been said. He came up just before dinner, much heated, and was very silent; yet seemed, according to the

old adage, to think the more. He declined drinking any wine, but after dinner when the President gave the . . . toasts, the King, the Queen and Royal Family and Lord Hood, this strange man regularly filled his glass and observed that those were always bumper toasts with him; which having drank he uniformly passed the bottle and relapsed into his former taciturnity. It was impossible during this visit for any of us to make out his real character; there was such reserve and sternness in his behaviour. . . Being placed by him I endeavoured to arouse his attention by showing him all the civilities in my power, but I drew out little more than yes or no. If you Fanny had been there we think you would have made something of him, for you have been in the habit of attending to these odd sort of people.'

Naturally enough Captain Nelson always stayed with Mr. Herbert when the *Boreas* was at Nevis and while the awkward affair of the American merchantmen was pending, Mr. Herbert, one day received a call from Captain Nelson when he was dressing for dinner.

The Governor hastened to welcome his visitor. 'Good God! If I did not find that great little man, of whom everybody is so afraid, under the dining room table playing with Mrs. Nisbet's little child!'

The little child actually brought Horatio Nelson and Fanny Nisbet together, much to the excitement of the primly curious young widow.

She was not so young as she said she was, though she had certain solid attractions. She was dark and inclined to be plump. She had a full, rather round face and a complexion that was swarthy. Her eyes, large, lustrous and kindly, were her best features; but her mouth was inflexible and hinted at stubbornness. As Mrs. Moutray had just gone Fanny Nesbit was an admirable consoler and Nelson and she became great friends.

When Mrs. Moutray sailed in the middle of March, Nelson was incapable of pulling up a thistle; but exactly three months later he was so far recovered that he considered it would not be at all surprising for his brother to hear that he was 'a Benedict.' 'If at all it will be before a month' he said.

But it was over two months before he actually proposed to this new paragon. Her aunt, Mrs. Herbert, the Governor's wife, had died, and Nelson, after reminding 'my dear Fanny' that 'time ever has a tendency to soften grief into a pleasing remembrance' and urging her to call religion to her aid 'because it will convince you that her conduct in this world was such as insures everlasting happiness in that which is to come,' proceeded to tell her that his greatest wish was to be united to her. 'The foundation of all conjugal happiness, real love and esteem is, I trust, what you believe I possess in the strongest degree towards you.' He closed by excusing his poverty on the ground of his integrity.

Mrs. Nisbet was not unwilling. It was hurricane time in the Islands. 'The mischief is great, but not so much as might have been expected,' wrote Nelson, describing a tempest at Antigua and the same was true of certain tempestuous hearts.

Mrs. Moutray was still waiting, and odd things were happening. 'My first letter from her came to me with the wafer opened' he told Collingwood, and although he chose to conclude 'it opened itself,' he admitted it was 'very odd that both our letters should be in the same situation.'

Meanwhile money problems had grown pressing. As Nelson had told Fanny in his proposal 'he was not so rich as others' and whatever dearest Fanny might think he was anxious to present himself as solidly as might be before His Excellency the Governor of Nevis. To Collingwood, his best friend, he confessed himself 'all expedition to catch Yankees.' 'My dear boy I want some prize money. I can't write more. Bless you.'

But prize money alone was too hazardous and too little, and in the late autumn Mr. William Suckling, of Kentish Town, received a familiar style of letter from his nephew.

' . . . You will smile in the first instance and say this Horatio is for ever in love. My present attachment is of pretty long standing but I was determined to be fixed before I broke this matter to any person. The lady is a Mrs. Nisbet . . . from her infancy . . . she has been brought up by her

mother's brother Mr. Herbert, President of Nevis. . . . Her age is twenty-two.' (It was really twenty-four.) 'And her personal accomplishments you will suppose *I think* equal to any persons I ever saw. But without vanity her mental accomplishments are superior to most people's . . . My future happiness I give you my honour is now in your power; if you cannot afford to give me anything forever you will I am sure trust to me that if I ever can afford it I will return it to some part of your family. I think Herbert will be brought to give her two or three hundred a year during his life and if you will either give me, I will call it – I think you will do it – either one hundred a year for a few years or a thousand pounds how happy you will make a couple who will pray for you for ever. Don't disappoint me or my heart will break. I can say no more but . . . pray let me know of your generous action by the first packet.'

Nelson was quite convinced that they would be a happy pair and went so far as to say that the fault must be his if they were not. 'My whole life,' he told her, 'shall ever be devoted to making you completely happy whatever whims may sometimes take me.'

He fell deeper and deeper in love. When he was at Nevis he never left her; when he was not he was always writing to her.

'Separated from you what pleasure can I feel? . . . All my happiness is centred with thee . . .

Every day, hour and act convinced me of it . . . With my heart filled with the finest and most tender affection do I write this . . . I daily thank God who ordained that I should be attached to you. He has I firmly believe intended it as a blessing to me . . . My heart yearns to you. Without you I care not for this world . . . God Almighty grant my sentiments may never change . . . Indeed, there is a moral, certainly they cannot. . . .'

Early in 1786 Mr. William Suckling promised the necessary financial help that his nephew so earnestly entreated and Mr. Herbert consented after Nelson had passed another year clouded by suspense, absence, law-suits and mosquitos. ('All Frank's care with my net cannot keep them out at present.')

In December, when arrangements were nearly ready for the marriage, Prince William came back to the station and announced his intention of giving the bride away. It was an exceedingly gratifying prospect for so convinced a monarchist as Nelson, particularly since 'His Royal Highness has not yet been in a private house to visit and is determined never to do it except in this instance.'

'There is no action in my whole life,' Nelson added, 'but what is honourable . . . I am . . . happy . . . on that account for I would . . . have no man near the Prince who can have the smallest impeachment as to character for as an individual I love him and as a Prince I honour him.'

One benefit at any rate was conferred on the station

by the Prince's presence and the season that was to culminate in the senior captain's marriage to a Governor's niece was the most brilliant that the Indies had ever seen. Captain Nelson and Prince William had last met in the Caribees in war time; but things were very different in peace. The first week of 1787 was a veritable blaze of happenings. On Monday, Major-General Sir Thomas Shirley, now fully willing to let bygones be bygones and forget the duty of youth to age, invited everybody to a long dinner party. Next day the Prince gave a reception on his ship. On the Wednesday he took Nelson to a dinner at St. John's for the benefit of the officers of the local garrison, after which everyone went on to a mulatto ball. On the Thursday there was a cock fight, followed by another dinner 'at Colonel Crosby's brother's,' and another ball, this time a white one. On Friday somebody else gave a dinner. And on Saturday the week wound up with a party at the house of the Admiralty Judge.

The seamen also had their share in the privileges attending the royal presence. All the brass work on the ships was kept bright enough to serve as a mirror; and as even this might have left them a little leisure the cannon balls were burnished too.

His marriage drawing on Nelson took a passing opportunity to consult an old gipsy on his future.

'At forty you will be at the head of your profession,' she said.

'And then——'

'I can tell you no more – the book is closed,' and the woman shook her head.

In the middle of February the *Boreas* returned to Nevis; but it was not yet possible to steal a moment with dearest Fanny, although Nelson 'never felt truly happy when separated from her.' To-day they must dine with merchants; to-morrow an expedition to Nicholas Town; on Friday a civic banquet at the port; on Saturday they were to sail to Old Road so as to be in time for Sunday dinner on Brimstone Hill and the Freemason's ball next Monday.

Such festivity altogether overwhelmed him, but this time he was to escape some of it because the picnic to Nicholas Town in the midday heat was too much for him, and not long after his Royal Highness also succumbed to this perpetual round of gaiety. Accordingly, he proposed that since they were now at Nevis together and the future was uncertain the marriage should take place immediately.

The ceremony was at last performed at Mr. Herbert's house on the 12th March, 1787. His Royal Highness, true to his promise, gave the bride away. He had never 'seen a lover so easy or say so little of the object he had a regard for.' But this was because 'the love was founded on esteem, the only foundation that can make the passion last.'

So at last the little shrunken captain who as a boy in Burnham Church had scrawled the baby

words Horace Nelson in witness that Hannah Pinner and Peter Dennis and the rest of them had duly plighted their troths in his presence was come himself to pledge, that in sickness and in health, for richer for poorer, for better or worse, he would love, cherish and honour Frances Herbert Nisbet, till death should them part. He could not leave her quite the fortune he would have wished but he did at least by a will made on that unforgettable occasion, 'give and bequeath unto my dearly beloved wife Frances Herbert if I have no children at the time of my death, all my estate or estates, both real and personal, of whatever kind and nature, and wheresoever, to her and her heirs absolutely, for ever.'

* * * * *

Four thousand miles away a young German gentleman enjoying a comfortable income and a rising literary reputation, one Johann Wolfgang Goethe, had just been introduced to Sir William Hamilton, His Britannic Majesty's Ambassador to the Court of the Two Sicilies, and to his mistress, Emma Hart.

HORATIO NELSON

PART TWO

LADY HAMILTON

From crayon drawing by Sir T. Lawrence (British Museum)

CHAPTER I

ROMNEY'S CIRCE

March 1764 – 1787

"'Tis not her air, for sure in that there's nothing more than common
And all her sense is only chat, like any other woman
Her voice, her touch might give the alarm, 'tis both perhaps or neither
In short –'tis that provoking charm of Celia altogether.'
Wm. Whitehead.

'The Knight – Hamilton, who is still living here as English Ambassador' (the entry is from Goethe's Italian journeys dated March 16th, 1787) 'after all his dabbling in Arts, after all his lengthy studies of nature, has found the pinnacle of that art and nature can afford – in a beautiful girl. She lives in his house – an English girl of twenty years – she is very beautiful and well modelled. He has had a Greek robe made for her and it suits her excellently well. When she dons it she lets down her hair, takes up a couple of shawls and so changes her attitude, her postures and her countenance that a man at last comes to think he is dreaming. He

looks on what so many thousand artists have sought to depict, in the very flesh, moving before him through many shifting scenes. She stands, she sits, she lies down, she kneels before you. Now she is serious, now she is sad, now she teases, now entices, then withdraws, allures, reproves, then waxes shy . . . one follows on the other and out of the other. She knows how to drape the folds of her wrap to suit each pose and how to change them again accordingly, and she makes a hundred different kinds of headgear out of the same cloths. The old knight holds the light up for her. He has given himself over heart and soul to this.'

* * * * *

When the seven year old Nelson was tracing his clear round Horace beneath the names of Hannah Pinner and Peter Dennis 'both of this parish,' a girl child was born to Lyon the blacksmith at Neston in Cheshire. And as a small boy in a green jacket was launching paper boats in the gutters of Downham Market, little Emma Lyon, aged three, was removed to her grandmother's cottage in the long low street of Hawarden in Flintshire.

Down that muddy road which during the next twelve years she came to know and hate so thoroughly the girl grew to a precocious womanhood. Her days were spent among the rugged grandeur of the wide moorlands, where gaunt women huddled in their scarlet shawls against the driving rain mist; tending long-tailed mountain sheep, least Arcadian

of little shepherdesses. Nightfall drove her back to the bulging wattle and sodden thatch of her grandmother's hovel and all the congested squalor of a Welsh interior. At fifteen, tired of being the bullied nurserymaid of a Flintshire farmer's wife, she set her face to London where, as everyone knew, gold lay about the streets.

She could not read, she could not write, she had no money, and she had no plan.

While the young post captain of the *Badger* faced for the first time the fire and fever that raged in Darien, Emma Lyon faced for the first time the steady fire of the cynic world. Somewhere near the present Blackfriars Underground Station lived Dr. Budd, House physician to St. Bartholomew's, and in his basement the girl from Wales found a place and a friend. For six short months she scrubbed and cleaned and polished and answered the bell together with a girl called Powell. (And how should worthy Dr. Budd guess that his kitchen harboured two such immortals – the memorable actress Jane Powell, of Drury Lane, and the thrice memorable Lady Hamilton?) At night-time she ran about the narrow link-lit streets, gaped round-eyed on chairs and coaches, looked upon the side life of the town – the roaring bullies, the slinking cutpurses, the sly pimps, and the painted harlots.

She stayed nowhere very long. She served in a fashionable shop in St. James's where she learnt to handle gems and costly stuffs and where also a

lady of quality, no better than she should have been, learnt to handle her. So for a very short space she lived in Arlington Street as 'a companion' to that lady. But when Emma at the same time became 'companion' to a man, her Sappho threw her over.

Captain Sir John Willett Payne, R.N., M.P., commanding his Majesty's Press Gang ship at the Tower wharf kept her in his turn for a time but he could not keep her long.

* * * * *

LECTURE

ON THE

Causes, Nature, and Effects of Love and Beauty, At the different Periods of Human Life, in Persons and Personages, Male, Female, and Demi-Characters;

And in Praise of the Genial and Prolific Influences of the

CELESTIAL BED!

As Delivered by HEBE VESTINA! The Rofy Goddess of Youth and of Health!

FROM THE

Electrical Throne! in the Great Apollo-Chamber, At the TEMPLE of HYMEN, in LONDON, Before a GLOWING and Brilliant Audience of near Three Hundred Ladies and Gentlemen, who were commanded by VENUS, CUPID, and HYMEN! to affit, in joyous Affembly, at the GRAND FEAST of very FAT THINGS, which was held at their TEMPLE, on MONDAY

Evening, the 25th of November, 1782; but which was interrupted by the rude and unexpected Arrival of his Worship,

MIDAS NEUTERSEX, Eſq; and his Bum-Poſſe, juſt as the Deſſert was about to be ſerved up.

Publiſhed at the earneſt deſire of many of the Company, and to gratify the impatient and very intenſe Longings of Thouſands of Adepts, Hibernian and Britiſh; – of the Cognoſceni; et de les Amateurs ardens des *delices exquiſes* de Venus!

To which is ſubjoined, a Deſcription of the ſtupendous Nature and Effects of the Celebrated

CELESTIAL BED!

The Temple of Hymen lay in the newly-built terrace on the Adelphi and thither flocked 'a silly audience' attracted by the plausible mysticism and erotic allurements puffed by Dr. Graham the purveyor of this latest sensation. In the Temple of Hymen there was music and mesmerism, there were mudbaths and magnetism; but the crowning glory of all was Vestina, the rosy goddess of health, who 'presided at that sacred vestal fire which she watched and whose application in the cure of diseases she had the honour of directing.'

The directing was performed by 'Vestina' alternately lying in a mudbath up to her chin with her hair elaborately dressed in the prevailing fashion with 'powder, flowers, feathers and ropes of pearls;' and displaying her perfect form in a glass case,

when the elaborate clothing of her head was compensated for by a corresponding lack of it upon her body.

Only Dr. Graham knew that those chestnut tresses, those smooth features, that florid colour, those grey lustrous eyes, that soft mouth and melting form which drew so many hundreds of worshippers to his Temple were the charms of Emma Lyon, for the moment named Emma Hart; and years later many persisted in recalling the visit to the Temple of Hymen of a pale-faced, fever wracked post-captain badly wounded in the attack on Fort St. Juan in Darien, who stretched his emaciated body awhile on the celestial bed beneath the supple hands of Hebe Vestina Hart.

Whether or no Nelson really entered the Temple of Hymen at that time there certainly was jostled in this crowd of worshippers at the amazing shrine of Mesmer and of Eros, the fashionable portrait painter George Romney. He was no amateur enthusiast, he had seen perfect figures before; but here was indeed the perfection of all perfections. Within a week she was sitting for him at Cavendish Square. Not before three hundred sittings had been recorded in his Diary did the wild eyes of the painter rest from following the myriad impressions of her lovely face.

He painted her enticing, a Baccante, alluring, Ariadne, as a Sybil, as Mary Magdalen, as Cassandra, as Sensibility, as Comedy, as Tragedy, as a

Spinstress, as a Nun, as St. Cecilia, as Alope, as Miranda, as Euphrosyne, serious, commanding in her majesty as Circe, the enchantress. But even as Circe, the face that smiles from his canvassess still seems to plead with posterity for the indulgence accorded to innocence. 'You have seen and discoursed with me in my poorer days,' she wrote to Romney years afterwards 'and I had no occasion to have lived for years in poverty if I had not felt something of virtue in my mind. I own through distress my virtue was vanquished but my sense of virtue was not overcome.'

Life still whirled her on. An English gentleman, Sir Harry Fetherstonehaugh, met her at Romney's studio and set her up as his mistress at Up Park at a corner of the Sussex downs. So the Welsh country girl learnt to become an English country lady. She rode to hounds with the best of them, sat at the head of the table when the county came to dine, managed (she who had herself run to answer the bell eighteen months before) her staff of domestics. When the sconces flickered she learnt to throw the dice, to cut the cards, to fumble guineas on the green baize, and to curse her luck, as though she had been born a gentlewoman.

But such outbursts annoyed her protector, for she was after all not a gentlewoman – yet; and 'Five and a half guineas for Coach hire' was more than Sir Harry cared to pay. There was a scene and she left in a fury in the clothes she stood up in.

She went back to the whitewashed cottage at Hawarden, to the grinding poverty once more. And too late she regretted her temper. Seven times she wrote to Fetherstonehaugh, pleading, enticing, alluring, serious, and sad. He took no notice; and she wrote to someone else.

* * * * *

The Honourable Charles Greville was a son of the Earl of Warwick and had a small post in the Foreign Office. He also had ideals and, though he was only thirty-one, a taste for the antique.

'Believe me I am almost distracted,' Emma wrote to him. 'I have never heard from Sir H. and he is not at Lechster now I am sure, what shall I dow, Good God what shall I dow, I have wrote 7 letters and no anser, I can't come to town for want of mony, I have not a farthing to bless myself with and I think my friends looks cooly on me, I think so. O G. what shall I dow, what shall I dow . . . O G. that I was in your posesion as I was in Sr H. what a happy girl would I have been, girl indeed, or what else am I but a girl in distres, in real distres, for Gods sake G. write the minet you get this and only tell me what I ham to dow, direct some whay. I am almost mad. O for God's sake tell me what is to become on me. O dear Grevell write to me. Write to me G. Adue and believe yours for ever Emly Hart.

'Don't tell my mother what distres I'm in and dow afford me some comfort.'

She spoke truly when she said she was a girl in real distress, for within two months she bore a child; and that spring of 1782 she became the mistress of the Earl of Warwick's son, the young man who had ideals.

He lodged her, with her mother who became housekeeper and called herself Mrs. Cadogan, among his other *objets d'art* in a little house in Edgware Row, in the then pastoral placidity of Paddington. It was an unassuming red-bricked house but it contained 'fine examples of the Dutch School' and works by 'the best English painters.' There was Sir Joshua Reynold's Thais (touched up by the artist to meet the owner's ideals), and there was Romney's Circe in the canvas as well as in the flesh. Here, kept in a strict seclusion and subjected to every elevating and improving influence that Greville could bring to bear, the seventeen year old girl began her education; while half-way across the world a young post-captain was being wrenched from the arms of his charmer in Quebec by Mr. Alexander Davison the contractor.

For two years she lived happily with Greville learning to be cultured and to be economical. She ran the home on £100 a year and for herself had another £30 for pin money. Her household accounts were necessarily strict. 'Apples, 2½d.; a mangle, 5d.; cotton and needles, 9d.; coach, 1s.; poor man, ½d. . . .' she noted it carefully down.

As Greville said 'she did not wish for much society

but to retain two or three creditable acquaintances, avoided every appearance of giddiness, habits both comfortable and convenient to me.' And Romney who saw much of her in these days found that 'her only resources are reading and music at home and sitting for pictures.' Her education was nearly complete.

In 1784 when Greville's rich uncle came over from Naples she was sent away to the seaside and very miserable she was without her lover. 'How teadous does the time pass awhay till I hear from you. Indead I should be miserable if I did not recollect on what happy terms we parted – yess but to meet again with tenfould happiness . . . This guidy girl of mine what shall we do with her Greville. O Greville you don't know how I love her indead I do' . . . again 'my dear Greville the recollection of past scenes brings tears in my eyes. To think of your goodness is too much . . . the post comes in abbout one o'clock I hope to have a letter to day.'

She strove hard to be economical. 'My dear Greville don't be angry but I gave me granmother 5 guines for she has laid some out on her and I would not take her awhay shabbily.'

And again, terrified lest he be displeased by her stay at so expensive a place at Parkgate; 'It is not through any neglect of seeking after other places for I have and as to Abergeli it is so dear that I could not with my mother & me & the child

have been there under 2 guineas & a ½ a week, it is grown such a fashionable place and Highlake as 3 houses in it & not one of them as is fit for a christian . . .' 'Greville I am oblidged to give a shilling a day for the bathing horse and whoman and 2 pence a day for the dress. It is a great expense and it fretts me when I think of it.'

The rich uncle went back to Naples and Greville himself began to consider economies, for his party had lost office and, as he had ideals, he resigned his government post. Money was scarce and it was growing scarcer. There was no more buying of pictures 'by the best English painters.' The house in Edgware Row also began to be a burden. Even a mistress seemed to have her drawbacks.

His only hope was that his uncle might die after making him his heir; his greatest fear lest his uncle should marry and get an heir of his own. To this uncle he wrote of his debts; from this uncle he received nothing but references to Emma: 'the fair tea maker of Edgware Row.'

The Rt. Honourable Sir William Hamilton, K.C.B., His Britannic Majesty's Ambassador to the court of the Two Sicilies, had a roving eye for the beautiful and a keen one for a bargain. He had already turned these twin talents to good account when the new excavations at Pompeii had unearthed a series of antique vases which set a fashion of which his Britannic Majesty's minister on the spot had been the first to take advantage by cornering the

latest discoveries with a view to selling them later on at a vastly inflated value to the British Museum (which he successfully accomplished) and to the Court of Prussia (which he did not). He had already given proof of his acumen and in his dealings with his nephew he was in his very best form. In short 'the fair tea maker of Edgware Row' was the price of Greville's debts.

The idea did not altogether displease Greville. 'If you do not choose a wife I wish the tea maker of Edgware Row were yours,' he wrote. But it was in his mind that if the 'tea maker of Edgware Row' were his uncle's then his uncle would not choose a wife. Moreover, as Greville's ideals precluded him from serving a party whose principles he did not approve Emma was practically his only asset.

Sir William, it is true, discovered some last scruples, but they were chiefly on his own account. 'As to Emma,' he wrote in the June of 1785, 'was I in England, and you was to bring your present plan to bear . . . I would take her most readily . . . but my dear Charles there is a great difference between her being with you or me for she really loves you when she could only esteem and suffer me . . . Though a great city, Naples has every defect of a province and nothing you do is secret. It would be fine funn for the young English travellers to endeavour to cuckold the old gentleman Sig. Ambasciatore.'

Emma's own scruples were not consulted at all

when the bargain was at last struck and she actually sailed with her mother for Naples under the impression that it was only for a six months holiday.

* * * * *

On April 26th, 1786 (it was her twenty-first birthday) the ship bringing Sir William Hamilton's latest bargain dropped anchor in the Bay of Naples. Away in the Indies the captain of the *Boreas* was penning a letter to his 'dearest Fanny'; 'farewell for a little time and bless you with all my heart and soul and do believe and never doubt but that I am with the most sincere affection ever your Horatio Nelson.'

And Emma too was thinking farewell for a little time. 'I try to appear as chearful before Sir Wm. as I can and I am sure to cry the moment I think of you for I feel more & more unhappy at being separatted from you and if my total ruin depends upon seeing you I will & must in the end of the summer, for to live without you is impossible. I belong to you Greville to you only will I belong.' But she had not seen Greville in the new year when Goethe found her at the British Legation in the Palazzo Sessa.

The Future had something more in store for her.

CHAPTER II

VOLCANOES IN ERUPTION

March 1787 – *September* 1793

'I did but see her passing by,
And yet I love her 'till I die.'
Anon.

By the end of March 1787, Nelson was ready to bring the *Boreas* home. Since the previous autumn his time had been entirely taken up with escorting Prince William on his tour round the islands and Nelson was ardently longing to see England again. No man had had such trouble, he said, 'but let me lay a balance on the other side. I am married to a amiable woman that far makes amends for everything. 'Till I married I never knew happiness and I am morally certain she will continue to make me happy the rest of my days.'

The *Boreas* and the Nelsons reached Portsmouth in the first week of July and the sudden change of climate was bad for both of them. Nelson first got a sore throat from the cold and then a slow fever from the heat, just bad enough to stop him doing

anything and not quite bad enough to send him to bed. Mrs. Nelson's lungs were affected by the smoky English towns. The young couple were not rich and soon found that they could not afford a house of their own. To live in lodgings in London was out of the question because of Mrs. Nelson's throat. Her new husband was very solicitous for her, and when he was seconded for a week or two to the Press Gang Service off the Nore he complained that 'he was as much separated from her as if he were in the West Indies.' Like many service couples before and since they decided that England was too expensive and they would try France.

But the Reverend Edmund Nelson would not hear of his son leaving him when they met so seldom and accordingly the young people went down to Burnham Thorpe on a visit of indefinite duration, in fact till the Captain should get a new appointment.

But the new appointment was slow to come. Nelson in his last cruise had carried himself high-handedly and had made enemies. Besides, the awkward affair of the confiscated American cargoes was the subject of further proceedings. The outraged Yankees claimed fabulous damages and the British Government was chary about giving another command to such a stormy petrel. His one time friend, Lord Hood, put him off with polite excuses, told him that 'a ship in peaceable times was not desirable' and kept out of his way, and Nelson

complained bitterly that 'not being a man of fortune was a crime.' 'None of the great care for me,' he told his old friend Captain Locker, and the long procession of days – each one so exactly like the last – piled on the agony of his boredom.

Burnham Thorpe, wrapped in the bucolic peace of the Norfolk ploughlands, carried a sentimental attraction to Nelson when he was far away at sea; but it was quite a different thing to be imprisoned there by lack of means and want of opportunity. The weeks became months, and the months years, and the world seemed to have forgotten him. It was not the best prelude to married life and the new Mrs. Nelson was not happily chosen to comfort him. He was firmly persuaded that an ungrateful country was unconscious of his signal service; that he had made himself awkward to get on with never entered his mind. He wanted Fanny to go on consoling him with the flattery she had once so generously given to the much discussed Captain of the *Boreas* when they met at Nevis; but she only fretted about her ailments, and, perhaps, because she saw so much of him understood why he did not get another ship and did not sympathise.

'Mrs. Nelson will be obliged to Miss Randall to tell her where honey-water is sold at Norwich,' is the single reference that he made to Fanny in all the letters he wrote to his friends to solicit and complain on his own account.

'I am commencing a farm, not a very large one

you will conceive but enough for amusement' . . . but he derived no pleasure from the ordinary farmer's amusements any more than he had done from the pastimes of the same farmers when they all went to school together at Downham Market.

'Shoot I cannot, therefore I have not taken out a licence,' and he gave up attending coursing meetings, 'for to state the truth I have seldom escaped a wet jacket and a violent cold.'

Sometimes he visited his neighbour Mr. Coke at Holkham where he could enjoy the distant pinpoint of sea at the bottom of the long avenue. Occasionally his cousin Lord Walpole sent him a dutiful invitation. Once or twice he paid an official visit to London.

Other and even rarer visitors also came to London in those peaceful years, the last of the eighteenth century and of the old aristocratic world. In the season of 1791 there returned on leave his Britannic Majesty's Minister to the Court of the Two Sicilies together with that charming pinnacle of all 'that art and beauty could afford' who controlled his establishment in Naples – Miss Emma Hart. She had at last reconciled herself to the cruel trick that dear Greville had played upon her five years ago, and while Nelson fretted the Norfolk days away had thrown herself into that wonderful new world wherein she chanced to be.

The 'recent amazing discoveries' at Pompeii had brought a whole host of visitors with attendant

gaities to the bright and boisterous city that spreads itself like a scallop around the clear waters of the Bay of Naples, the city that for all its drawbacks ('lice and fleas there is millions,' Emma had told her Greville), for all its naked beggars, its noisy carriages rolling over the big flagstones, its pick-pockets and its sores, 'hath much more beauty than either London or Paris, wine the best in Europe and a wondrous plentiful soil,' a soil rich with the bones and ashes of cities dead and devoured. Life there for at any rate the first two of the five orders into which its people were so rigidly divided was one search after pleasure and beauty, and had not Herr Goethe described Emma as the pinnacle of all that beauty could afford?

The wealthy powdered and brocaded seekers who descended in those days at the 'Three Kings' or the 'Cardinal's Hat,' all hurried to the Palazzo Sessa to gaze upon Sir William's latest treasure in her many graceful postures and to applaud the music of her voice. Whether she was in 'undress having on a muslin chemise very thin' or her gown was 'purple sattin with white sattin petticoat trimmed with crepe and spangles,' and her cap 'lovely from Paris – all white feathers' they 'all allowed they never had seen such a *belissima creature* in all their life.' The poor prayed to her as to the madonna, it was said, and as with all this she was yet chaste and aloof it was sworn that Sir William had secretly wedded her, sworn so often and so openly that he

came to think he might do worse, and actually made her his Lady Hamilton at Marylebone Church this September of 1791. They went back to Naples in the autumn, Nelson was at Burnham. They did not meet. Nor in the normal course of things was it conceivable that they ever should.

But as Sir William who had written a book on the subject knew, amazing things follow on the vagaries of a volcano. 'I believe we shall have a great erruption soon,' Emma wrote; and when it came the great erruption was felt even in the little wrinkle in Britain's coloured quilt that was the dell of Burnham Thorpe, whence it blew a certain embittered and shrivelled martinet of a retired Captain into immortality.

* * * * *

Returning to Naples the Hamiltons passed some days at Paris and while they stayed there a proud queen whose memory still dwelt on the rabble of women who had lately burst into Versailles gave Emma a letter and perhaps more that was not written down to convey to her sister, Maria Carolina the queen of the two Sicilies. The sense of that message ran like a shock across all Europe. Kings, Grand Dukes, Princes, and Bishops in their gilt rococco rooms turned pale beneath their powder. Authority, Loyalty, and Respect, were breaking fragments of the past, for a new and terrible world was in the making: the 'Great Erruption' had come.

Everywhere men and women were taking sides for the Battle of Beliefs and first among them all Horatio Nelson declared for the old world and the established order. Even in Norfolk there were Jacobins and it maddened him to see the justices so remiss in putting them down.

'I think very soon every individual will be called forth to show himself, if I may judge from this county' he told the Duke of Clarence.

There were Societies formed and forming on 'principals certainly inimical to our Constitution in Church and state.' The dissenters were the inspiration and the force of the Republican movement. Mr. Charles James Fox was its protagonist.

At Norwich the new 'clubs' were even supported by the Corporation who avowed that "till some of the nobles and others in Parliament were served as they were in France' they would never get their right. It was the instinct of the sailor accustomed to sudden emergencies to strike at the roots of such a movement – 'to take away the licenses from those public houses who allow of improper society's meeting at them.' But it was a Justice of the Peace who warned Captain Nelson that 'No Justice would render himself unpopular at this time for his life and property were gone if the mob arose.'

Across the Channel the mob had already risen. To the coalesced Kings of Europe France threw the head of a King; and the guns of King George's

ships thundered a royal answer to the rights of man.

* * * * *

'I am now fixed for the *Agamemnon*,' Nelson could at last write in January, 1793, and shortly after he flew the Captain's red, swallow-tailed pennant from the mainmast of a line of battleships.

Away in Naples Lady Hamilton was showing her maid Vesuvius, 'but when she saw the great fire she fell down on her knees and cried out "O Janaro mio, Antoino mio," so I fell down on my knees and cried out "O St. Loola mio, Loola mio".' All unknown to both of them, against the livid background of a greater fire, a ship even then was ploughing its way across the narrow seas.

Naples had not yet felt the force of the French Revolution. Groups of idlers in silks or rags still lounged the length of the long chattering Toledo and dark-eyed beauties dropped flowers lazily from the flat plaster roofs of the peach-coloured houses. The nobility still plied their canes upon the backs of heedless lazzaroni who got in the way of their coaches. About the city's wide squares glib touts speaking 'a little broken English and exceeding all their fraternity in knavery' proffered themselves as couriers and valets to wealthy milords on the Grand Tour. Ferdinand IV, King Big-nose ('the King who made himself a lazzarone'), romped and fished among his faithful subjects at the water-side.

Lady Hamilton had 'no time to write to any of my friends these five months, I literally have been so busy with the English, the Court and my Duties . . . . going twice a week to give dinners, balls, etc., etc., returning at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning after a dinner of 50 & supper of three hundred . . . then to dress to go to Court . . .' 'We had Sir Wms. band of musick and I satt and received all the Nobility who came every night. I sung 2 searrous songs & 2 bufos. One was a recitative from a Opera the finest thing you ever heard for 10 minutes their was such a claping that I was oblidged to sing it over again & I sung after that with a tambourin in the character of a young girl with a raree show the prettiest thing you ever heard.'

Sometimes she and her husband went for an expedition 'on our asses to Porticia' or 'to Capri' (an Italian Prince asked if they went by land 'onely think what ignorance!') or 'to show me of to some Dutch Officers that was with a 60 gun ship' in the mornings; while in the afternoon 'the house was ful of painters painting me . . . he (Sir William) as now got nine pictures of me and 2 a-painting. Marchant is cuting my head in stone that is in Camea for a ring, there is a nother man modeling me in wax and another in clay. All the artists is come from Rome to study from me . . . and there is a picture going to the Empress of Russia.'

'You can imagine how happy dear Sir William

is . . . we live more like lovers than husband & wife, as husbands & wives go now-a-days.'

It was June; the *Agamemnon* was at Cadiz.

Nelson was entertained to a bull fight. 'We had to regret the want of humanity in the Dons and Donnas . . . twelve thousand were present . . . we had what is called a fine feast for five horses were killed and two men very much hurt; had they been killed it would have been quite complete . . . It would not have displeased me to have some of the Dons tossed by the enraged animal . . . Nothing shall tempt us to see another.'

To his 'Dearest Fanny' he declared 'how I long to have a letter from you. Next to being with you it is the greatest pleasure I can receive. The being united to such a good woman I look back to as the happiest period of my life.'

In September the *Agamemnon* was despatched with letters to press his Britannic Majesty's Minister to the Court of Naples to raise troops to garrison Toulon which the Monarchist Powers had just seized in the name of King Louis XVIII. On the 11th Nelson wrote to his wife 'at anchor off Naples'; early next morning he landed.

Sir William was prompt to grant him audience. In his corner room with its views over the wide Bay on both sides, where the white sails of Nelson's ship towered proudly above the russet and tan canvasses of a host of feluccas and xebeques, Sir William in his plush and brocade received the little Captain in

faded blue. Business was soon done. Nelson told of the siege of Toulon, of its unexampled success. Sir William of six thousand Neapolitans, for was not their Queen Marie Antoinette's sister?

'You are a man after my own heart,' said Nelson, 'you do business in my own way.'

Sir William offered to put him up at the Embassy and hurried off to ask Lady Hamilton to get ready 'the room prepared for Prince Augustus. The Captain is a little man,' he said, 'and far from handsome, but he will live to be a great one.'

Within the hour Romney's Circe met her Ulysses.

* * * * *

Four days later the *Agamemnon*, trailing a strip of silver at her stern, sailed back to Toulon.

'Lady Hamilton has been wonderfully kind and good . . . She is a young woman of amiable manners who does honour to the station to which she is raised.'

Fanny read the words at Burnham where the partridge shooting had begun.

CHAPTER III

THE MIDDLE SEAS

December 1793 – *February* 1797

'Tis Britain's care to watch o'er Europe's Fate
And hold in balance each contending State.'
Joseph Addison.

Nelson sailed from Naples post haste when he heard that a French convoy had put into Leghorn and there was a prospect of prize money. He was in such a hurry that he had to bundle off the Hamiltons, the Bishop of Winchester, and a whole party of distinguished guests 'besides other Baronets, etc.' who had come to breakfast on the *Agamemnon*, and forego the pleasure of entertaining the King of the Two Sicilies who was expected to lunch.

At Leghorn the news of his coming convulsed the crew of the French frigate in charge of the convoy. To meet the crisis the good Republicans elected their sergeant of marines captain, while the captain to avoid becoming sergeant of marines, got ashore 'with no small difficulty and not a rag of clothes.' The convoy escaped much to Nelson's

disgust. It was a sad loss, because, as he told Fanny, 'prizes are not to be met with except so covered by neutral papers that you may send in fifty and not one turn out good.' He bore away to the northwest to rejoin the royalist armament off Toulon.

He found their situation 'wonderful.' But, 'the hills are occupied by the enemy who are erecting works for mortars and cannon (Bonaparte's cannon!) and whether we shall be able to maintain our most extraordinary acquisition time only can determine.'

The Monarchist Allies were not able to maintain their extraordinary acquisition. 'Lord Hood' (the Commander of the Naval forces in the Mediterranean) 'put himself at the head of the flying troops;' but the torrent was too strong. 'Many of our posts were carried without resistance. At others which the English occupied everyone perished. Each teller makes the scene more horrible.'

Toulon lost, Lord Hood sought another base, and that erstwhile Ensign of the 79th Foot, who had fought his way at Nelson's side through the brushwood of St. Juan thirteen years before and was now Lieutenant-Colonel John Moore, agreed with the Corsican Nationalists for the handing over of their island to King George.

While the Corsicans carried on a guerilla war against the French Republican garrisons, Nelson with a small squadron harried their steep coasts.

'On the 21st January (1794) the French having their storehouse near a watermill close to San

Fiorenzo, I landed sixty seamen . . . they threw all the flour into the sea, burned the mill, the only one they had, and returned on board.'

On February 5th, 'I proceeded to Centuri, took possession of the town, was obliged to burn six sail, four loaded with wine.'

Next, 'I anchored off Rogliano . . . landed and struck the national colours with my own hand and ordered the tree of liberty in the centre of the town to be cut down, not without great displeasure from the (Republican) inhabitants.'

His 'Jacks behaved most amazing well.' They began to look upon themselves as invincible, and almost invulnerable, and 'really minded shot no more than peas.' But with the soldiers, especially Colonel John Moore, he could not get on well. 'What the General could have seen to make a retreat necessary I could not conceive,' he declared, 'the Navy and Army wish each other at the devil.' And there was still no prize money worth having – 'nothing but honour and salt beef'; and to his parson brother William he had to write, 'I feel myself very much obliged by your offer about the farm but don't think I shall make prize money enough to purchase an estate.'

On March 27th, having occasion to send to Sir William Hamilton for artillery stores ('the General thinking it right not to grant to his Lordship a single soldier,'), he 'begged leave to present my most respectful compliments to Lady Hamilton, I assure

you I remember with gratitude both your kindnesses to a stranger.' The letter found Emma writing to another admirer, her dear Greville, for 'an English hat, very fashionable.' 'Pray send me some ribbands and 14 yards of fine muslin or fine leno. Ask any lady what leno is.'

For Fanny, however, Nelson reserved a sublimer strain: 'I have reason to be thankful to that Being who has ever protected me in a most wonderful manner. If it is His good pleasure, I shall in nothing more rejoice than in being once more with you.'

Violets covered the red Corsican cliffs. The seamen were landing guns, mortars, and stores for the siege of Bastia. They were to co-operate with British troops 'as fine as ever marched' who were to march overland from St. Fiorenzo, but, according to Nelson, there had not been much co-operation when Bastia fell after a month's siege. 'Our Fiorenzo army had most meanly marched to the top of the heights to rob us of the little glory we may expect.'

Nor was his disgust mollified by 'a sharp cut on the back,' and his name was only mentioned by Lord Hood as . . . 'having an equal claim to my gratitude' with three captains and five lieutenants. 'Lord Hood does not put me where his letter does, in the rear' he commented bitterly.

But his ardour was still high. To Sir William Hamilton he wrote 'we shall now join heart and

hand against Calvi' and he described with great zest to Fanny how 'dragging cannon up steep mountains and carrying shot and shells has been our constant employment. . . . Corsica in respect to prizes produces nothing but honour, far above the consideration of wealth . . . not that I despise riches, quite the contrary. . . . Had I attended less to the service of my country I might have made some too. . . . I trust my name will stand on record when the moneymakers' will be forgot.'

The attack on Calvi was hotly contested. On July 12th, a round shot, ploughing up the ground hard by where he was standing, scattered the sand in his right eye. He took care to assure Fanny that he continued as well as usual and 'except a very slight scratch towards my right eye . . . which has not been the smallest inconvenience have received no hurt whatever'; but he lost the sight of the eye. When Calvi fell on August 10th he left the place and hoped never to be in it again.

From Burnham Rectory there came a characteristic letter:

'My dear Horatio,

'It is well-known that the predestinarian doctrine is amongst the creeds of military men. It may sometimes be useful: yet it must not exclude the confidence Christianity preaches of a particular providence which directs all events. It was an unerring Power, wise and good, which diminished the force of the blow by which your eye was lost;

and we thank the hand that spared you – spared you for future good, for example, and instruction, in many subsequent years. There is no fear that flattery can come from me; but I sometimes wipe away the tear of joy at hearing your character in every point of view so well spoken of. The letters received from you give me and your good wife the pleasing intelligence that your health has not suffered from the long fatiguing service you are professionally obliged to go through; and also that success has generally been the issue of your endeavours to make yourself known to the world as a man of probity and judgment; not only looking towards the things that are your own, but to those of others also. Your lot is cast, but the whole dispersing thereof is of the Lord: the very hairs of your head are numbered – a most comfortable doctrine. Upon the whole, I am as strong as can be looked for; how many do I see and hear of, that are either fallen or much more afflicted by age than myself. Bless God, my days are lengthened, I hope, for some good purpose. Accept, my dear good Son, the usual but most hearty expression of love and friendship from your affectionate father,

EDMUND NELSON.'

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Corsica was now blessed with a British Viceroy, Sir Gilbert Elliot, and the *Agamemnon*, its task accomplished, returned to Leghorn. Nelson was weary and disillusioned. 'I have lost an eye, £300,

and my health,' he said, 'for services in which I have been wounded others have been praised who were actually in bed. They have not done me justice; but never mind; I'll have a gazette of my own.'

It was no wonder that he wrote to Fanny at the end of the year: 'Before spring I hope we shall have peace, when we must look out for some little cottage. I assure you I shall return to the plough with redoubled glee.'

But at the end of the year his ship was still cruising in a desultory manner along the coasts of Genoa and Tuscany and her Commander was plunging deeper into depression. His eye was 'in almost total darkness and very painful at times,' and his heart was full when he thought of the treatment that he had received: 'Every man has got some place; I, only I, am without reward . . . Sometimes I am ready to give it all up.'

In the Republican service a man's merit might well raise him not only from sergeant of marines to ship's captain but from tapster to Marshal of France; but Nelson was fighting for an order of society that was not favourable to the speedy reward of his genius. The only thing that still kept him at his post was the hope that a lucky prize or two might furnish him with the modest two thousand pounds that he needed to retire to 'a neat cottage' with his Fanny. 'Much as I shall regret being so long parted from you,' he wrote on January 17th, 1795, 'we

must look beyond the present day and two or three months may make the difference of every comfort or otherwise in our income.'

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The Republic, one and indivisible, could not suffer the loss of Corsica, and, in March, 1795, the Toulon fleet was turned out to retake the Island. Besides the liberty, equality and fraternity that they exuded from every timber and the red phrygian caps that denoted their patriotism, the Toulon ships undeterred by those conventions accepted in reactionary navies, carried blacksmith's forges to make shot red hot, and liquid fire to burn up their aristocratical enemies. As supercargo they brought the Republican Mayor of Bastia to put back in his own Town Hall.

There were only thirteen half-manned British ships in the Mediterranean at the time and Sir William Hamilton, pressed to send Neapolitan reinforcements, had despatched a solitary line of battle ship, commanded by Prince Caracciolo. Whether the Neapolitans came or not was no great matter in Nelson's eyes; but when they did come he was agreeably surprised with the Prince and paid him the only compliment that he ever spared for a foreigner: 'We all love Captain Carragholillo or whatever his name is.'

The English fleet was off Genoa when they met the French squadron on its way out of Toulon. There was not a proper engagement. 'A battle it

cannot be called,' Nelson assured Captain Locker. But his luck was in at last. The only ship to engage the enemy alone was the *Agamemnon*.

Lacking their proper officers, the French citizen crews manoeuvred their ships like cockneys on the Serpentine. The *Ca Ira* (80 guns) collided with her neighbour, and smashed two topmasts in the impact. A frigate took her in tow just as Nelson came up in the *Agamemnon*. He sailed along behind the *Ca Ira* and repeatedly poured double shotted broadsides into her till other British ships came up and she was captured. Another ship coming to her aid was captured too. At last Nelson had secured both prize and honour; but he was not satisfied. 'Had I commanded our fleet,' he told Fanny, 'either the whole French fleet would have graced my triumph or I should have been in a confounded scrape.'

Another disappointed man was Sir William Hamilton. It was a most annoying year for him. Not only was he bringing up 'a prodigious quantity of bile,' but the political situation was completely upsetting his usual life at Naples. His friend Beckford, for instance, whose visit he was awaiting, had been held up at Lisbon with his physician, maitre d'hotel, baker, cook, valet de chambre and three English footmen ('I cannot travel with fewer servants, my establishment here consists of eighty-seven') by a French privateer in the mouth of the Tagus.

But Sir William was at least gratified by the steady increase in his wife's political importance. For Emma was playing yet another rôle. Through her influence over the Queen of the Two Sicilies the Monarchist Powers were trying to drive Naples into war by land. 'I live constantly with the Queen,' Emma told Greville, 'she has had the goodness to supply me with horses, an equerry and a servant in her livery.'

Neapolitan intervention had become imperative, for the French Revolution was marching into Italy at Bonaparte's heels and thrones were unsteadier than ever. To stem the tide of Liberty, Nelson was sent that summer to co-operate with the Austro-Piedmontese Army on the Riviera.

In July he was in Vados Bay. 'Here I am,' he wrote to Fanny, 'having commenced co-operation with an old Austrian General almost fancying myself charging at the head of a troop of horse. When the General gets to Nice he will have the baton of a Field-Marshal. What shall I get? However, to you I may add that my character stands high with almost all Europe. Even the Austrians know my name perfectly.'

But the General never got to Nice, and before the leaves fell along the Riviera Roads, Nelson was convinced 'by occular demonstration, of the futility of continental alliances,' and France's citizen batallions were well into Italy.

Poor Sir William Hamilton's plans were shat-

tered. His bile was worse than ever, for all Dr. James' 'sovereign powders.' His friend Beckford, having at last left Lisbon for Naples, had been chased into 'an odd Moorish looking place in Spain,' by a Barbary Corsair, whence he was only too glad to get back to England as quickly as possible.

The Austrians ran eighteen miles without stopping, that November, and Vados was lost. 'We have indeed established the French Republic' was Nelson's bitter comment.

* * * * *

1796 – the year V of the Republican Calendar – saw a changed revolutionary Paris. Bloodshed and anarchy had given place to laciviousness and extravagance; the Convention had been replaced by the Directory; poverty with principles was supplanted by wealth without taste. A new society of profiteers, political journalists, courtesans, and adventuresses in highly suggestive Grecian robes, draped the revolution with the assurance of bourgeois security. It became respectable for Liberal reformers to welcome Bonaparte into Italy; and the more necessary for the old order to fight for its existence.

In his speech from the throne, King George III declared himself persuaded 'that nothing is so likely to accelerate a general peace as to show that we are prepared to prosecute the war with the utmost vigour until we have the means of concluding such a peace as the justice of our cause may entitle

us to expect.' After this strikingly original contribution to British Statesmanship, Mr. Grey, the Radical, moved an address stating the desire of the House of Commons to meet 'any disposition to negotiate with an earnest desire to give it the fullest effect.' There voted for Mr. Grey's motion 50, against 189.

'I now see no prospect of peace,' Nelson wrote. His desire to see Fanny 'in a cottage of our own,' had still to content itself with the thought that 'time would soon wear away,' and the coming of a new Admiral who appreciated his talents. Sir John Jervis asked him if he had heard any more of his promotion. 'You must have a larger ship, for we cannot spare you as Captain or Admiral,' he said. He favoured Nelson with an independent command off Genoa to prevent a French landing on the Italian coast, while lamenting to the British Minister at Turin his inability 'to give him a squadron equal to his merit.' 'You do as you please with Sir John Jervis, it makes no difference to you who is commander-in-chief,' complained Nelson's colleagues.

But it was not pleasing off Genoa that March. Spring was late in coming, the Riviera was still covered with deep snow, and Nelson was constrained to pass his time stamping his feet on the quarter-deck with the Italian mountain coast lowering in the distance under a leaden sky. 'I shall not be very sorry to see England again,' he wrote sadly. 'I am grown old and battered to

pieces' (he was thirty-seven) 'and require some repairs.' He seemed to be out of step, too, in the march of things. The Sardinians had risen against Monarchy and Liberal thought was making excuses for them. Privateers were ravaging the Jamaicas – a thing unthinkable, when the *Boreas* was on the station, and Wilberforce was 'meddling again with the slave trade.'

In Europe the war went worse. In May he wrote to Fanny 'the Dukes of Parma and Modena have both made Treaties with the French, paying large sums of money . . . certain pictures are to be sent to Paris . . . The Pope has offered ten millions of crowns to prevent their coming to Rome. . . . it is said they refuse it unless the Apollo Belvedere is sent to Paris. . . .' The Austrians had just run from a post twenty miles from the enemy – 'many of their officers are in bed with their whores when they should be in the field,' protested an observer.

At last the summer came and with it the *Agamemnon* returned home. Nelson was transferred to a 74 gun ship, the *Captain*, with the rank of Commodore. He celebrated his new appointment by sending Captain Locker a quarter cask of sherry, and by restoring to the French Minister at Genoa a valise of clothes belonging to an artillery General that he had taken on a French Prize since 'generous nations are above rendering any other damage to individuals than such as the known of laws of war prescribe.'

Bonaparte marched into Leghorn on June 28th. 'You are a Neapolitan scoundrel and a macaroni eater and I will send you to Florence,' he said, as he packed off the Governor. Nelson was ordered to blockade the port.

'We lie very snug in the North Road, smooth as in the harbour,' he wrote to Collingwood, and it was no wonder, for the *Captain* was getting 'a hundred Roman bullocks a week from Genoa,' to say nothing of 'onions, lemons, biscuits, etc.'

The population set a time limit to the occupation in the hearing of Napoleon's officers – but would do nothing to accelerate it. 'Sometimes I despair of getting these starved Leghornese to cut the throats of the French crew' complained Nelson, and no sooner had he written the words than his evangelical associations pulled him up with a start – 'what an idea for a Christian!'

But that autumn the Genoese, under pressure from the French Army, stopped his bullocks, 'the Russian Minister sent me word that last night the Doge put the question to the Senate to give me thirty bullocks, but it was overruled and I am not to have one'; so Nelson went to Genoa to discuss the subject. 'The Doge was very curious about me; he asked my age, said he had heard much of me, that the blockade of Leghorn was strict beyond what he could have thought possible.'

He came back full of pride and wrote to Fanny:

'Had all my actions, my dearest Fanny, been gazetted, not one fortnight would have passed during the whole war without a letter from me: one day or other I will have a long Gazette to myself; I feel that such an opportunity will be given me. I cannot, if I am in the field of glory, be kept out of sight. Probably my services may be forgotten by the great, by the time I get home; but my mind will not forget, nor cease to feel, a degree of consolation and of applause superior to undeserved rewards. Wherever there is anything to be done, there Providence is sure to direct my steps. Credit must be given me in spite of envy. Even the French respect me: their Minister at Genoa, in answering a note of mine, when returning some wearing apparel that had been taken, said, "Your Nation, Sir, and mine, are made to show examples of generosity, as well as of valour, to all the people of the earth. . . ."

'I will also relate another anecdote, all vanity to myself, but you will partake of it: A person sent me a letter, and directed as follows, "Horatio Nelson, Genoa." On being asked how he could direct in such a manner, his answer, in a large party, was, "Sir, there is but one Horatio Nelson in the world." The letter certainly came immediately. At Genoa, where I have stopped all their trade, I am beloved and respected, both by the Senate and lower Order. If any man is fearful of his vessel being stopped, he comes and asks me;

if I give him a Paper, or say, "All is right," he is contented. I am known throughout Italy; not a Kingdom, or State, where my name will be forgotten. This is my Gazette.

'Lord Spencer has expressed his sincere desire to Sir John Jervis, to give me my Flag. You ask me when I shall come home? I believe, when either an honourable peace is made, or a Spanish war, which may draw our Fleet out of the Mediterranean. God knows I shall come to you not a sixpence richer than when I set out. I had a letter a few days since from H.R.H. the Duke of Clarence, assuring me of his unalterable friendship. With kindest love to my father, believe me your most affectionate husband,

HORATIO NELSON.'

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That same October as he had foreseen war came with Spain, and outnumbered by the combined fleets, Sir John Jervis' squadron was ordered to evacuate Corsica and withdraw to the Straits. They arrived on December 1st.

It was a measure Nelson 'could not approve.' 'I lament our present orders in sackcloth and ashes, so dishonourable to the dignity of England whose fleets are equal to meet the world in arms.' Most of all he regretted the abandonment of old conquests and old friends. His farewell to poor Sir William, left to fight single-handed against the enemy influences at the Court of the Two Sicilies, rang a

note of despair. 'To say I am grieved and distressed but ill described my feelings. I hope the King of Naples may yet make peace. God knows how contrary to my feelings this has been heretofore.'

CHAPTER IV

THE WAY TO GLORY

1797 *February – November*

'Glorianna the Don may attack us
With his thunders again and again,
He must reach us before he can rack us,
And where are the galleons of Spain?'
Austin Dobson.

On St. Valentine's Eve, 1797, the sullen fire of Spanish signal guns drifted over the grey waters of the South Atlantic. Nelson in the after cabin of the *Captain* waited hopefully for morning. To glory and prize money, then security and a comfortable home with Fanny, he looked forward with confidence, for, like fighting men of all times, he could never regard the war as likely to last more than a few months longer.

Enemy battleships, twenty-seven of them altogether, were drifting about thirty miles off Cape St. Vincent in two ill-defined groups – eight to the south, nineteen south-west of the British Fleet. There were fine ships among them; high-masted, intricately carved, elaborately gilded astern. The

Holy Trinity, somewhat incongruously named since it possessed four decks, was the largest and latest of ocean giants, and, like other ocean giants of a later day, she was top heavy. The same defect was noticeable among most of her consorts. Those in which an attempt had been made to remedy the failing by using lighter wood, tended to snap their topmasts in a gale. The canvas monopoly, vested in two Spanish factories, supplied inferior sails, and the ships' crews, drafted infantrymen from line regiments and newly impressed peasants and fishermen, could not have obeyed their officers even had they understood what they meant.

All through the night the Spanish ships groped to establish contact and to reconcile conflicting statements as to the numbers of their adversary variously reported between nine and forty sail; and, when the morning of February 14th broke, cold, damp and hazy, with light winds blowing from the west, their fleet was still divided.

At dawn the English ships to the north of them formed line ahead. The formation of the squadron was a long and tedious business. But the heterogeneous company on the Spanish vessels had not yet evolved any kind of order when the sixteen English ships, having begun to manoeuvre at four a.m., came sailing down on them just before midday, in V-shaped formation, point first, driving a wedge between the nineteen Spanish ships to their right and the eight to their left. Three from the end of the

British line on the west side of the V, was the 74-gun ship *Captain*, flying a broad pennant, with Nelson on the quarter-deck.

From both fleets gun-fire broke out; and the round iron balls of grape and tins full of nails and scrap iron thrashed the water into foam. 'A few minutes before noon we opened our fire, and passed nineteen sail of their line giving and receiving as we passed.'

The English ships sailed on majestically clothed in a sulphurous cloud stabbed with tongues of flame. One Spanish vessel ran along the whole line unseen in the smoke. On the *Captain's* gun decks, seamen, stripped to the waist and scorched with black powder, served cannon red hot from firing, and powder monkeys scampered to and fro with buckets of water to sluice them down.

The smaller group of Spanish ships at last beat off to the westward. As they did so, Nelson from his post at the rear of the British fleet saw that the big group were trying to sail north in the hope of getting right round behind the British line to join their comrades.

Without delay and without concerning himself with the ships ahead of him in the line, in defiance of his Admiral's plan, he signalled a change of course, swept away at right angles to the rest of the fleet, and placed himself straight across the northward path of the retreating Spanish vessels.

He 'was immediately engaged by the *Holy Trinity*,

two three-deckers, and several two-deckers . . . at one time we were engaged by nine ships. . . .'

As soon as Jervis realised what Nelson had done, he signalled to the nearest ships to support the new move. The suddenness of so unorthodox a manoeuvre destroyed the last vestige of Spanish moral and the unwieldy ships under their red and yellow flags drifted helplessly into each other.

One struck its flag to Captain Collingwood's ship, but he 'disdaining the parade of taking possession of beaten enemies most gallantly pushed up to save his old friend and messmate.' At one moment even the *Holy Trinity* struck her colours, but owing either to confusion or incompetence or both she was never secured.

For two hours in the early afternoon the *Captain* kept up what everybody present considered a most bloodthirsty fight against two Spanish ships, the *St. Nicholas* and the *St. Josef*, sustaining what Nelson called 'a most tremendous fire' (he expended 146 barrels of powder and had twenty-four men killed) 'till having lost her foretop mast, not a sail, shroud or rope left, her wheel shot away and incapable of further service . . . ,' the commander ordered his men to board the *St. Nicholas*.

The seamen, with their cutlasses, and the soldiers of the 69th (from Corsica) with fixed bayonets, broke into the Spanish ship through the window of the poop gallery, and Nelson himself came stumbling in behind. They found themselves locked in

the great cabin, while the Spanish officers fired their pistols at them through the windows. They battered in the door and the soldiers discharged their brown besses into the faces of the Spaniards, driving the enemy before them into the forecastle, where Nelson found 'two or three Spanish officers, prisoners to my seamen, and they delivered me their swords.'

Then, from the cabins in the stern of the next enemy ship alongside (the *St. Josef*) came a frantic shower of pistol bullets and the soldiers began shooting into her galley, while Nelson, shouting for men from the *Captain* to board the *St. Nicholas*, directed 'my people to board the first-rate (*St. Josef*), which was done in an instant . . . Captain Berry assisting me into the main chains.' From the *St. Josef's* quarter-deck a Spanish officer cried out that the ship had surrendered, and Nelson, 'together with Captain Berry, and Lieutenant Pierson (69th Regiment), John Sykes, John Thompson, Francis Cook – all old *Agamemnon's* – and several other brave men' stood victorious on the prize, while 'the Spanish Captain with a bended knee presented me his sword and told me the Admiral was dying with his wounds below.' And so, 'on the quarter-deck of a first-rate, extravagant as the story may seem, did I receive the swords of vanquished Spaniards, which, as I received, I gave to William Fearney, one of my bargemen, who put them with the greatest *sang froid* under his arm. . . .'

At half-past three that afternoon the glorious and bloodthirsty battle of St. Vincent was won. Altogether the British had lost seventy-three men, of whom twenty-four belonged to the *Captain*. They took four Spanish ships, and the remainder had been effectively frightened into Cadiz. Nelson's spectacular move had focussed the attention of the whole Fleet upon himself, had accorded him an excellent advertisement ('every ship in the Fleet gave *me* three cheers'), and was directly instrumental in the taking of the four prizes; but it had also thrown the whole of Sir John Jervis' scheme out of gear and prevented the rounding up of the eight ships in the smaller Spanish group.

That Nelson had his doubts even in the first flush of his self-satisfaction, he proved by going at daybreak on the morrow to the frigate *Lively* that was to carry the good news home, for Elliot, the ex-Viceroy of Corsica was on board and Nelson hoped to be the first to catch his ear. But the ex-Viceroy had gone to a conference on the flagship, and in his absence Nelson unburdened himself to a Colonel. The latter, fulsome in his praises, observed that the sailor 'received my compliments with great modesty, though evidently with great satisfaction.'

'How came you Commodore to get into that singular and perilous situation?'

'I'll tell you how it happened,' Nelson began, and launched forthwith into a detailed description of

each incident that had concerned himself the day before.

The Colonel then tactfully adverted to the honours that must attend such distinguished services. 'The Admiral will, of course, be made a peer and his second in command noticed accordingly. As for you, Commodore, they will make you a Baronet. . . .'

Scarcely were the words out when Nelson jumped up, caught his arm, and 'looking most expressively in his face,' said 'No, no: if they want to mark my services, it must not be in that manner.'

'Oh, you wish to be made a Knight of the Bath' (I could not imagine that his ambition at that time led him to expect a peerage).

'Yes, if my services have been of any value, let them be noticed in a way that the public may know me and them.'

The Colonel closes his account of the singular interview with the somewhat naive remark that 'from his manner I could have no doubt of his meaning, that he wished to bear about his person some honorary distinction to attract the public and mark his professional services.'

To attract the public was essential; besides, Nelson may well have had qualms as to what Sir John Jervis would say in his official dispatch. Accordingly, within a few days of the battle, he sent Sir William Locker a detailed account of the engagement, extremely flattering to himself and ending 'N.B. There is a saying in the Fleet, too

flattering for me to omit telling, viz., "Nelson's Patent Bridge for Boarding First Rates," alluding to my passing over an enemy's eighty-gun ship. If you approve . . . you are at perfect liberty to insert the account in the newspapers, inserting the name of the Commodore instead of I.'

The same day he heard of his promotion to Rear-Admiral of the Blue, and Fanny wrote her dearest husband: 'May it please God your fame and successes continue and increase under this promotion!'

'I thank my God,' said the old Rector, 'with all the power of a grateful soul for the mercies He has bestowed on me . . . the name and services of Nelson have sounded throughout the City of Bath from the common ballad singer to the public theatre.'

Nor were ballad singer or actress to lack material if their hero could help it. 'Nelson's Patent Bridge for Boarding First Rates will be a saying never forgotten in this Fleet,' Nelson assured Suckling; and he sent to the Mayor and Corporation of Norwich 'the sword of the Spanish Rear-Admiral Don Xavier Francisco Winthuysen.'

He had gauged the situation with acumen. There was no mention of the word 'Nelson' in Sir John Jervis' official dispatch.

Prize money was some solace, for he was already entitled as a Flag Officer to a comfortable share in the proceeds of the half-million dollars which the Spanish prizes would fetch, and he could tell

Fanny that the Spanish war would give them the cottage and piece of ground 'which is all I want,' though she, for her part, could only write like any other woman, 'I sincerely hope, my dear husband, that all those wonderful and desperate steps – such as boarding ships – you will leave to others.'

But Fanny may have been pardoned if she felt a glow of legitimate pride when she handled as change from her mercer, instead of the usual silver crowns, broad Spanish dollars that were being issued by the Bank of England after March 10th, owing to a temporary shortage of new silver, with King George's head struck over the neck of the Spanish Monarch.

'The additional head on the dollar impressed
Is to circulate Jervis' fame;
To his valour 'tis owing, it must be confessed,
England made an impression on Spain.'

* * * * *

Rear-Admiral Sir Horatio Nelson, K.C.B., as he now became, took a responsible share in the blockade of Cadiz which followed the battle of St. Vincent; and in the May following he was still watching the town in charge of the innermost line of ships.

He was so near that he could see the ladies walking along the walls and promenades; and sent a message to reassure them before firing a salute on

the King's birthday. The guns of his ship did not, however, always fire harmless salutes. One bomb ship threw shells into the very heart of the town, and although it was 'unfortunately found that the large mortar was materially injured from its former services,' he was able to report that 'our ships did much damage, the town was on fire in three places, a shell that fell in a Convent destroyed several priests' (no harm they will never be missed) and that 'murder and robbery were going on – a glorious scene of confusion.'

But it was not only the besieged who suffered. In the scorching days of July, with no cover to beat off the Spanish sun from the white holystoned decks, the seamen were constantly going down with brain-fever. Upon madness followed mutiny. News had already leaked through to the men in the Mediterranean Fleet of how their comrades impressed upon the ships at the Nore had caught a spark from the revolutionary bonfire; and between decks there were whispers of ships' committees and the red flag. But the whispers were overheard. Four ringleaders were tried by court-martial and adjudged guilty as the sultry twilight of a Saturday night fell over Cadiz Bay. That same night Sir John Jervis told Nelson that the death sentence must be carried out 'tomorrow morning although it is Sunday.' Nelson 'very much approved of its being so speedily carried out, even though it is Sunday,' for, 'had it been Christmas Day instead of Sunday I would have

executed them, we know not what might have been hatched by a Sunday's grog.' At dawn the four men swung from the yard-arm of his Majesty's ship *St. George*.

Such things showed Sir John Jervis that the fleet was in danger of becoming demoralised, and he ordered a diversion against the harbour of Santa Cruz on the Island of Tenneriffe where Spanish merchantmen homeward bound from La Plata and Peru had taken refuge. Nelson received the command of this new expedition and was busy for many weeks, ordering gun platforms, scaling ladders, sleighs for dragging cannon and 'as many iron ramrods as possible, it being found that the wooden ones are very liable to break when used in a hurry.'

On July 17th his detailed orders were communicated to the various officers commanding. 'Each ship's boats should be kept together by towing each other. The boats will be in six divisions and nearly got on shore at the same moment. . . . The moment the boats are discovered by a firing being made on them the bomb vessel to commence her fire on the town and to keep it up till the flag of truce is hoisted. . . . Each ship to land the number of men as against their names expressed exclusive of officers' servants. . . . It is recommended to put as many marine jackets upon the seamen as can be procured and that all should have canvas cross-belts. . . . Culloden's men to carry with them four ladders, a sleigh hammer, wedges, and a broad axe,

the boat oars to be muffled with either a piece of canvas or kersey.'

On the 20th the eight ships of his command sailed from Cadiz and on the 24th they anchored by dark off Santa Cruz. But the very darkness was their undoing. Most of the boats missed the Mole and the surf cast them up on shore, smashing their boards to matchwood. Many of the men were drowned, the ammunition was sodden. All the scaling ladders were washed overboard. In the middle of their confusion the town awoke to the clash of church bells ringing the alarm and soon the huzzahs of the assailants were drowned in the rattle of musketry and the roar of cannon.

Five boats, led by Nelson himself, gained the Mole. But as the Admiral was drawing his sword to step out of his boat a grape shot, ripping through the right arms of seven seamen in front of him, shattered his right elbow. He dropped into the arms of his stepson, crying out 'I am shot through the arm, I am a dead man!'

They laid him in the bottom of the boat and bound him up with 'silk neckerchiefs' and the shirt of one of his bargemen and then pushed off again back to his ship.

With a spirit that astonished everyone he told the surgeon to get his instrument ready for 'he knew he must lose his arm and the sooner it was off the better.' 'The instrument' was a little saw, some eight inches long like a tool from a child's carpentry

set. The feel of the coldness of the bare steel on the ligaments of his arm made Nelson twinge.

When at last the hand-saw had carved its way through the bone, the surgeon asked whether the severed limb should be embalmed to be taken home. The recumbent figure, ashen pale and looking smaller than ever, feebly shook its head. 'Cast it down there,' he said weakly, pointing at a hammock into which a dead seaman had been placed ready to be thrown overboard.

Captain Troubridge and some three hundred and forty men had established themselves on the Mole. They drove spikes into the touch-holes of the guns and at dawn marched to the Town Square hoping to meet other parties from the beach. But none came to join them, and having little ammunition and no provisions or scaling ladders, they were constrained to parley with the Governor – who agreed that 'the troops belonging to his Britannic Majesty should embark with all their arms, in consideration of which they should not molest the town or any of the islands in the Canaries and that prisoners should be given back on both sides.'

Poor Nelson was now as depressed as he had been elated after the sea battle. 'I am become a burden to my friends and useless to my country,' he wrote to St. Vincent; 'When I leave your command, I become dead to the world, I go hence and am no more seen. I hope you will give me a frigate to convey the remains of my carcase to England. A

left-handed Admiral will never again be useful; therefore the sooner I get to a very humble cottage, the better.'

A prey to these sentiments he embarked upon the long voyage home. 'I shall not be surprised,' he told Fanny, 'to be neglected and forgot as probably I shall no longer be considered as useful. However I shall feel rich if I can continue to enjoy your affection.'

On the first day of September, 1797, he was landed at Spithead, whence he proceeded immediately to join the invalids and the half-pay officers down at Bath.

* * * * *

When Nelson got back to England several people knew the real facts about the Battle of St. Vincent, and those best informed were aware that the *St. Josef* had not really been captured by him over his 'Patent Bridge,' the *St. Nicholas*, as he had boasted, but had in fact already struck before he boarded her, to the *Prince George* (Captain Sir William Parker). But Nelson had captured the public ear and monopolised the credit.

On the very day that he was landed at Spithead, Sir William Parker exploded. 'I have heard some time back,' he protested, 'that from a statement of the action of the 14th February by the then Commodore Nelson, I had not the credit that properly belonged to me.' Sir William was no hand at controversy. He had no friend who could commu-

nicate his version of the battle 'to the newspapers.' He had only seen Nelson's version of the engagement at the end of July when he had written for enlightenment. But Nelson, somewhat curiously, had given 'no immediate answer,' and when he at last deigned to reply to his colleague, had left a message with the commander-in-chief 'by whom he desired it to be delivered to me (Parker) after he was gone to England, as I was told to prevent a rejoinder.'

Sir William maintained that the *St. Josef* had surrendered not to Nelson's boarders, but to the fire of the *Prince George* and, 'from her disabled state fell on board the same Spanish ship Commodore Nelson was on board of,' and that Nelson had only captured a vessel that had already surrendered to Parker. And like the San Fiorenzo Army which, at the siege of Bastia, 'had most meanly marched over the heights,' he had deprived his comrades of 'what little glory they might expect.'

Parker's protest was ignored. It did not suit the Government of the day to stress unpalatable facts. Nelson had just come home a wounded hero and a popular idol and it was expedient to let the public worship their idol in peace.

For the England of 1797 that Nelson had come back to was less stable, less prosperous, and altogether less confident than the England he had left three years before. War, continuous, wearisome, and never decisive abroad had brought hunger, unemployment and commotions at home. Present

discontents were being repressed with a ferocity altogether foreign to the good-humoured old countryside into which Horatio had been born. The very Navy had mutinied at the Nore. There were ugly gatherings in ale-houses and meeting-houses which resounded to shouts of 'No war, no famine.' Unkempt mechanics in the north were forming the 'new Trades Unions,' soon to be declared illegal along with all manner of reformist, democratic and even philosophical societies. Worst of all, freedom still had its champions among 'those vile dogs of opposition,' as Nelson called the Radicals and Pacifists at St. Stephens, where Charles James Fox moved to repeal all the new emergency legislation because 'in proportion as opinions are open they are innocent and harmless.'

To distract the English people from shouting for the liberties they had lost, it was advisable to make them shout for the battles they had won, and, above all, to leave them their self-elected hero to shout about. Nelson filled this rôle admirably. He was a splendid model for the print makers. The weather-worn blue swallow-tailed coat with its tarnished lace, the battered cocked hat, the single gleaming eye, the empty sleeve, conspicuously pinned across the chest, were already impressing themselves upon the popular mind. And, although there were men who said that Santa Cruz had been a defeat and that the *Captain's* move at St. Vincent was neither so original nor yet so brilliant as had

been said, was not the Spaniard's sword in Norwich Museum for all to see?

So when Nelson arrived at Bath, although he was again in no state to philander with its powdered beauties, he found, as Southey has it, 'honours enough to soothe his wounded spirit.' He was invested with the freedom of Bristol and a grateful England bestowed upon him a pension of a thousand pounds a year.

But it was not so easy to soothe his wounded body, even though he was 'beset with a physician, surgeon and apothecary.' His arm was stitched up with silk threads and every day they had to be tugged in the hope of bringing them out, which was agonising. The pain kept him awake at night and he took opium as a sleeping draught.

Fanny was always with him. She brought herself with a great effort of will to look on while his arm was dressed, so as to be able to dress it herself later on. They talked over their future plans, of her son Nisbet who saved Nelson's life at Tenneriffe and of the house they would live in after the war. He would start to write letters – an agony for him to write and agony for the recipient to read; and Fanny used to finish them at his dictation.

Before the September leaves fell on the Mendips, he started post for London to be formally invested with his Knighthood, and to receive the freedom of the City. The jolting was excruciating for his arm and when they had got as far as Newbury, where

they put up at the 'Pelican,' he asked John, the boots, whether he could proceed by water. 'Oh, yes sir,' answered the boy, delighted to exchange words with a hero; 'you can go to Reading by the canal and down the river to London.'

The Nelsons duly arrived at Mr. Jones' lodgings, 141 Bond Street. But the journey had reopened the wound. He had had 'a very miserable passage' and his first night, lying awake listening to the clatter and rumble of wheels over the cobble stones, found him 'not the least better than when I left good Dr. Weir' (the ship's doctor at Cadiz). But there was great gratification in the loud huzzahs that greeted his few public appearances, for his 'general reception from John Bull had been just what he wished.'

While London was celebrating the latest Naval victory by smashing every window that failed to show a festive candle, Nelson, trying to get to sleep with laudanum, had omitted to set a patriotic light in the casement, and the mob pounded at the door; till a terrified servant cried out that Sir Horatio Nelson lay within and could not be disturbed. There was an embarrassed silence, someone shouted 'You will hear no more of us to-night,' and the rabble went its way.

When the Investiture took place at St. James, his Majesty was 'most gracious.' 'You have lost your right arm,' said the little turkey-cock of a King, with his usual originality.

'But not my right hand, sir,' replied Nelson,

presenting the gallant Edward Berry, his ship's captain.

Then the King proceeded to ask after the general health of various other officers, and concluded the interview by remarking to the wounded hero that 'his country had a claim for a bit more of him.'

The College of Heralds certainly had. Their bill for making him a K.C.B., when all the customary *douceurs* had been included, came to over £500. There was Garter King at Arms who got his £8 10s., and the Gentlemen Ushers of the Privy Chamber who got £5, and the Gentlemen Ushers, Daily Waiters, who had £5 also; and the Quarter Waiters who only had £4; and at the bottom of a very long list there came the Yeomen of the Mouth with £1 16s.; the Gentlemen of the Buttery and Cellar with £1 12s.; the Surveyor of the Dresser with 10s.; and the Master Cook with £1, to say nothing of an item of £3 6s. 8d. 'for the Principal Usher of Scotland.'

All this excitement brought the pain again and made sleep still harder. Not until the November fogs swathed the dirty brick house-fronts, was it possible for the Reverend Mr. Greville, Minister of St. George's, Hanover Square, to announce at Sunday morning service, 'an officer desires to return thanks to Almighty God for his perfect recovery from a severe wound and also for the many mercies bestowed on him.'

Now at last he was well enough to receive the

civic honours that London was anxious to bestow – the freedom of the City and 'an elegant sword voted him by the Corporation for the meritorious conduct in the unsuccessful attack against the Island of Tenneriffe.'

At one o'clock in the afternoon of Tuesday, November 28th, 1797, a neat and shrunken little Naval Officer, with a black patch over one eye and an empty blue sleeve pinned across his white waistcoat, stepped into the office of the City Chamberlain at Guildhall. There were waiting for him, both the Lord Mayor and the Chamberlain, Alderman John Wilkes.

Wilkes, too, was a great man in his own way; at any rate, he had been the greatest demagogue of his time, perhaps the greatest demagogue of any time. Thirty years before, London had shouted for him as loudly as ever London shouted for Nelson; albeit, it was a less loyal shout altogether. The pillars of Church and State shook in those days to the cry of 'Wilkes and Liberty,' though there had certainly been much more liberty then than there was now. But John Wilkes had grown very respectable, for he was old and tired. It was to be his last public appearance, this presentation to the most loyal fighter against all things subversive.

'Sir Horatio Nelson, I give you joy . . . with true satisfaction I give you thanks . . .' Nelson stood stiffly to attention. On the table was the gold casket containing the freedom of the city; it had cost

a hundred guineas. One of the three may have appreciated the irony of it all.

'Many of our Naval Commanders have merited highly of their country by their exertions, but in your case there is a rare heroic modesty which cannot sufficiently be admired.' Was he sarcastic – the old Wilkes had often been sarcastic; anyhow, no one smiled.

'You have given warmest applause to your brother officers, but your own merit you have not mentioned.' Perhaps, after all, the great rebel was enjoying one last gibe at the established order.

Nelson was not altogether at his ease, but the speech was ending now, and Wilkes was certainly serious when he said 'May you long live to enjoy the grateful benedictions of the country which you honour and protect,' and placed the hundred guinea casket in the Admiral's hands.

CHAPTER V

LADIES' FINGERS

November 1797 – *July* 1798

'When pious mariners your powers adore
Daughters of Nereus – hear and save.'
James Marriott.

As soon as the presentation was over Nelson was anxious to return to Bath, but it was not easy to get away. First, he had to attend a Thanksgiving Service at St. Paul's for a naval victory over the Dutch at Camperdown where he had not even been present; and then he was involved in a squabble over the Prize Money from St. Vincent of which St. Vincent had kept the Admiral's share, although all the flag officers present believed they had an equal claim. But the weeks of tedious delay were not without their recompense.

Before he travelled down to Somerset with Lady Nelson on New Year's Day, 1798, they had at last found the ideal cottage wherein to pass the years of the Admiral's decline. It was at Roundwood, near Ipswich, in Constable's country, and they both

greatly looked forward to the long evenings they should pass together there when the guns should at last have stopped.

In the meantime, Lord Lansdowne had put his place in a box at the Bath Assembly at Nelson's disposal. Some of the handsomest ladies in Bath were partakers of that box; 'was I a bachelor, I would not answer for being tempted,' Nelson avowed; 'but as I am possessed of everything which is invaluable in a wife, I have no occasion to think beyond a pretty face.' He was now in great good spirits, 'panting to be in actual service' as his father wrote.

The war was still going very badly. All Italy was in a panic. A Russian diplomat reported on 'French men-of-war, chock full of all of the plunder of Venice like the fat Aldermen gorged with turtle and venison, now in the Port of Corfu.' None knew where the terrible Bonaparte would strike next. 'I tremble for Naples should the monkeys reach Rome,' wrote one of Sir William Hamilton's friends. Valuables were shipped hither and thither in a vain quest for safety. Under the menace of a French invasion of Tuscany Beckford wrote, 'precise orders to Messrs. Panton to send all my cases over to Corsica'; but Britain had abandoned Corsica and Messrs. Panton hired a vessel at £1800 sterling to carry these goods to Naples. 'Pictures and carrara marbles, Cimabue Giotto, and all that old pedantry of painting' worth £750 at the most. 'Had they

been left they might have been redeemed for a trifle' he told Sir William Hamilton, but Sir William could not concern himself with trifles.

The position in the Two Sicilies was critical. Every day brought rumours that the French Army or the French Navy (no one seemed certain which) was about to swoop down on Naples. Ten thousand French were bivouacked among the Lombardy vineyards and twenty-five thousand more were massed along the Riviera between Genoa and Marseilles. A mighty Armada was fitting out in Toulon. By the red glare of torches, shipwrights and carpenters laboured throughout the night. The white pine-clad hills echoed to the ring of blacksmiths' hammers and the roar of innumerable foundries. A violent spasm of patriotic energy convulsed the French people, keyed up by the most gigantic and mysterious of projects.

'Forgeons, forgeons, forgeons bien,
V'la qu'on vous fait sabre et pique,
Pour aller grand train,
Soldats de la republique,
Vous ne manquerez de rien.'

'It appears that the scheme is to revolutionise Naples,' ran the report of the British Secret Service in Paris. And Sir William, most of all, knew how well the ground had been prepared. Popular with the Church and the poor, the Royal Government

dependent on its '*Festa Forca e Farina*' was cordially loathed by the intellectual and professional classes in the capital.

'Do you think it possible' Lord Bristol asked him, 'that there can be forty thousand malcontents ready to rise?' It was more than possible. 'A man of great quality' (a near relation of the Noble Lord) 'as he walked muffled, heard the garrison of Capua talk treason in their cups: "Why don't these French come and rid us from Austrian tyranny?" '

But France looked further than Naples. From a Mediterranean that should be made a Republican Lake, the Rights of Man were to be proclaimed to every corner of the earth. From the Paris that was the lodestar of the malcontent, 'emissaries arrived and went from England and Ireland.' Dark figures in conical hats and many caped riding coats emerged at odd hours in small French fishing villages. 'Great secrecy is observed respecting the manner of their conveyance, which is believed to be partly by boat and partly by neutral vessels,' Pitt's agents reported; 'the emissaries either go to Paris or to Brest, where Tom Paine is.' Britain alone stood between the old order and world revolution; and nothing could prevent the Mediterranean becoming the focal point of such a revolution if the British Fleet failed.

The British Fleet was at Lisbon and it was for Lisbon that Nelson sailed on the *Vanguard* (74 guns) at the end of March, a square blue flag at his

mainmast, a blue ensign at the mizzen. 'The times are big with events,' he told his brother, 'and before the year gets round we shall either have a good Peace or what I dread to think on. But God's will be done.' Fanny was unusually sad when they said good-bye and it seemed as if a shadow was falling across their lives. In a letter that he wrote before they weighed anchor, his heart weariness found voice: 'God bless you all and ever believe me. I have no wishes but for a speedy Peace.'

In fourteen days the *Vanguard* anchored in the Tagus. The news of Nelson's coming had preceded him. 'I am very happy to send you Sir Horatio Nelson again,' wrote Earl Spencer, the First Lord of the Admiralty, to St. Vincent, 'I believe I cannot send you a more zealous, active and approved officer and I have reason to believe that his being under your command will be agreeable to your wishes.'

In the great cabins, as the marsala passed, all the talk was of the new activity at Toulon and the probable destination of the Armada gathered there. 'Eighty thousand men are embarking for some expedition' Fanny heard at Roundwood. In Whitehall, while the *Vanguard* was yet on its way to the Tagus, it was believed that the real goal of the Toulon Expedition was India by way of Egypt. Pitt's spies had worked well. 'Some four hundred French officers have been sent through Constantinople' they reported; 'they have gone in small

companies to make their way to India to offer their services to Tippoo Sahib and the Mahrattas to excite a war in Hindustan favourable to the expedition to Egypt.'

A frigate sailed for the Tagus bearing the news to St. Vincent. 'Should you determine to send a detachment into the Mediterranean' the dispatch ended, 'I think it is almost unnecessary to suggest to you the propriety of putting it under the command of Sir Horatio Nelson whose acquaintance with that part of the world qualifies him in a peculiar manner for the service.'

'I do assure your Lordship that the arrival of Sir Horatio Nelson has given me new life,' the Admiral replied; and on the following day Nelson was given 'Most Secret' orders to proceed immediately to Gibraltar and there to take command of such ships as might be in harbour with which he was to sail into the Mediterranean and establish contact with the French at Toulon.

At Gibraltar were two battleships and four frigates (smaller and faster vessels, the cruisers of the eighteenth century) and with this force Nelson sailed on May 4th. The Gulf of Lions was unusually smooth; and within a week he was before Toulon. He captured a corvette which gave him specific news of what was happening in the Port. The great Bonaparte himself had just arrived and twelve thousand men were embarked on the transports. Nineteen sail of the line were in the harbour and

further convoys were constantly arriving from Marseilles.

Nelson took a Smyrna merchantman bound for Marseilles with cotton and was priding himself on the effective way in which he was harassing the enemy when a violent storm of wind and rain, lasting forty-eight hours, snapped the *Vanguard's* foremast which fell in two pieces across the fo'c'sle and dragged overboard beating against the ship's bottom. The ship rolled and laboured and had to be towed into a friendly Sardinian Port.

'Figure to yourself,' wrote Nelson, 'a vain man on Sunday evening at sunset, walking in his cabin with a squadron about him, a very rich prize lying by him. Figure to yourself this proud, conceited man, when the sun rose on Monday morning, his ship dismasted, his fleet dispersed, himself in such distress that the meanest frigate out of France would have been a very unwelcome guest.' The storm had been more baneful than ever he believed, for the very north wind that broke his foremast and scattered his squadron bore the French fleet out to sea.

While he was refitting and re-victualling the *Vanguard* after the storm there came the greatest news that he had so far heard in his career. Urgent instructions from the Lords Commissioners had reached St. Vincent. A picked fleet was to be sent into the Mediterranean at once to seek 'the armament preparing at Toulon,' and on falling in with

it, 'to take, sink, burn or destroy it.' At the personal insistence of the King himself this vital command was to be entrusted to Nelson.

St. Vincent instantly sent him eleven seventy-four gun ships and the total fleet of fourteen first-rate line of battle ships met off Barcelona on June 7th.

They were not all that could be wished. The hulls of two were leaky and all of them were short of stores. Their rigging was 'old as could be,' but their officers and their crews were picked men and there was no squadron afloat to touch them at navigation or gunnery. Unfortunately, no frigates appeared at their rendezvous. They had lost touch in the storm and were still looking for Nelson in the Bay of Naples when he sailed from Barcelona without them.

Deprived of its eyes and ears the British fleet set out for Naples where the French were believed to have sailed. 'I hope we are in good time,' Nelson wrote to Sir William Hamilton, 'are the ports open to his Majesty's fleet and have the Governors orders for our free admission and for us to be supplied with whatever we want? If it is convenient, I much wish for some frigates and other fast sailing vessels for by a fatality mine have left me. I want information of the French fleet. I want some good pilots for the coast of Sicily or for whatever place the enemy's fleet may be at, for I mean to follow them even if they go to the Black Sea.'

Naples was terrified. With a French army in Italy and a French fleet in the neighbourhood, and with a French resident everlastingly threatening the wrath of the Directory, General Bonaparte, and the Republic One and Indivisible, poor King 'Bignose' saw visions of the guillotine. It was futile for Hamilton to beg for frigates or pilots or even for an order to supply his Britannic Majesty's fleet in the Ports of the Two Sicilies. The King made himself scarce and royally inaccessible. When Nelson anchored in the Bay on June 17th, only the British Ambassador had information for him. The French fleet had passed the south coast of Sicily steering south-east. Bonaparte was on board the *Sans-Coulotte* with his servants, astrologers, naturalists and mathematicians. The ships were 'visibly much encumbered with lumber of all sorts.' They were sailing very slowly. But Hamilton would offer no concrete help. The King could not be got at and it was quite impossible to obtain an order to open the Neapolitan Ports.

Nelson was highly discomforted. Without frigates he could not hope to find the enemy; without supplies and a base he could not keep his fleet at sea.

'God forbid,' he said, 'that the enemy should escape me and get into any Port. It is proper to be prepared for the worst. My distress for frigates is extreme.'

But there was still a bright spot. While Hamilton

had been trying to move the King, Lady Hamilton had spent some profitable hours with the Queen. Maria Carolina, as Marie Antoinette's sister, had a bitter hatred of the French; and as Emma's friend an affection for the brave Admiral Nelson. 'My dear Admiral,' Emma wrote as Nelson's ship made ready to sail, 'God bless you and send you victorious, and that I may see you bring back Bonaparte with you. The Queen desires me to say everything that is kind, and bids me say with her whole heart and soul she wishes you victory. God bless you my dear Sir . . . I cannot describe to you my feelings on your being so near . . . ever, ever, dear Sir, your affte. and grateful Emma Hamilton.'

Twilight had fallen over the Bay and the *Vanguard's* sails were being unfurled when a boat rowing for dear life came alongside, with a packet for the Admiral. 'Dear Sir, I send a letter I received this moment from the Queen. *Kiss it*, and send it back by Bowen as I am bound not to give any of her letters, Ever your, Emma.' Nelson read the royal words and scribbled a reply.

'My dear Lady Hamilton, I have kissed the Queen's letter, pray say I hope for the honour of kissing her hand when no fears will intervene. Assure her Majesty that no person has her felicity more at heart than myself, and that the sufferings of her family will be a tower of strength on the day of battle, fear not the event, God bless you and Sir William, pray say I cannot stay to answer his letter

here. Yours faithfully, Horatio Nelson, 6 p.m.' The *Vanguard* sailed for Sicily in the wake of the French fleet, between hope and fear.

At Syracuse the Governor had received the King's orders, but there was still nothing from the Queen. 'I find every good will toward us and hatred of the French but no assistance for us,' Nelson lamented, 'there is no co-operation.'

The French minister was even allowed to send out information of the coming of the English fleet. There was at last news of the French, but bad news. Malta had been 'most treacherously given up' by its Grand Master and the Knights of St. John, and Bonaparte's Armada, after taking in fresh supplies there, had sailed away eastward.

Nelson concluded that the Admiralty's information was correct and that Bonaparte's destination was Egypt. He gave orders for the British fleet to sail for Alexandria and sent an urgent dispatch to the British Consul. 'I think,' he wrote, 'their object is to possess themselves of some port in Egypt in order to get a formidable army into India.'

It was June 22nd. Late that afternoon Nelson's look-out men reported three strange sail on the horizon. There were no frigates to investigate and the Admiral, unwilling to risk scattering his force, left the strangers to themselves. He was sure that by this time the French fleet must be in Alexandria. But the French fleet was not. Their progress from Malta had been far slower than Nelson suspected.

The battleships were lamentably overcrowded and had to keep contact with three hundred and eighteen over-loaded transports. On each of their seventy-four gun ships were three hundred and fifty soldiers to control a mutinous impressed crew, bursting with revolutionary energy – against their own officers. One of the line of battleships was so rotten that she could not mount the necessary guns. Stores were short, and all the cables, spars, sails and anchors made with such haste and ardour around Toulon were so unsatisfactory that the fleet could not move more than fifty miles in a day.

That night the lapping waters were shrouded in a mist through which boomed the signal guns of Nelson's fleet. From their crowded decks the anxious Frenchmen could hear the dull reports. As their heavy ships lurched through the night each distant cannon seemed to fire a funeral shot for the buried hopes of the Revolution. Should dawn find them within sight of the English the whole expedition would certainly be blown to atoms before noon. Bonaparte, his servants, his Egyptologists, his astrologers, and his finest troops would have been as completely and as utterly obliterated as Pharaoh's host in the waters of the Red Sea. Any one of a hundred chances might have caused the history of the world to have been written another way. As it was, the French bore stealthily to the northward and daylight found the British still heading for Egypt across a waste of empty waters.

On the 28th, Nelson arrived at Alexandria. The French had not yet come and he could get no news of them. Thwarted and angry, he sailed out of the Port to see if his quarry had put in somewhere on the Syrian Coast. The very day he sailed for Syria, Bonaparte arrived at Alexandria. There were no British frigates to stay on watch and as the topmasts of Nelson's ship sank below the eastern horizon the first French spars climbed the western sky.

From Syria Nelson sailed to Crete; from Crete, weary and disappointed, he returned on July 19th to the Port of Syracuse.

'The devil's children,' he told Sir William Hamilton, 'have the devil's luck. I cannot find, or to this moment learn, beyond vague conjecture, where the French fleet are gone to. All my ill fortune, hitherto, has proceeded from want of frigates.'

Worst of all, Emma's energy had not conquered King 'Bignose's' fears. Sicily was correctly neutral, the Governor of Syracuse was deaf to all entreaty, and Nelson found himself completely immobilised for want of supplies.

He talked wildly of returning to Gibraltar. 'Our treatment is scandalous for a great nation to put up with, and the King's flag is insulted at every friendly port we look at.'

With an aching heart he poured out his troubles to Emma: 'I am so much distressed at not having any account of the French fleet and so much heart-broken at the treatment we receive that I am hardly

in a situation to write to an elegant body. Forgive my want of those attentions which I am ever ambitious to show you. If we are to be kicked in every port of the Sicilian Dominions the sooner we are gone the better. Good God! How sensibly I feel our treatment.'

But even as he wrote help was on the way. While he had been sailing, 'six hundred leagues with an expedition incredible' and had 'near died with the swellings of the heart,' ladies' fingers were deftly disentangling the thread of Europe's destiny. In a sun-washed room in that long pink palace, faced with dusty stone, that looks out over the Bay of Naples, Emma had cajoled the Queen and at long last, on the very day that Nelson wrote to Naples, the Queen's command came to Syracuse. The Port was opened as by a miracle and the energy of the whole City was directed to the refurnishing and revictualling of the English ships.

'My dear friends,' he wrote to the Hamiltons, when the task was done, 'thanks to your exertions we have victualled and watered; and surely watering at the fountain of Arethusa, we must have victory. We shall sail with the first breeze, and be assured I will return either crowned with laurel, or covered with cypress.'

Refurnished and refreshed the British fleet glided out from Syracuse across the Jonian Sea. Off the Greek coast a captured French ship told them that Bonaparte's Armada had reached Egypt. On a true

scent at last, they turned once again for Alexandria.

At last, late in the afternoon of the final day of July, 1798, a French look-out man watched the tall silhouettes of the British ships riding down upon him from out of a blood-red sky; and Nelson gazing eagerly from his quarter-deck saw his long-sought quarry clustered in a dark mass upon the waters of Aboukir Bay.

CHAPTER VI

BRITANNIA RULES THE WAVES

August 1st, 1798

'Sed minuit furorem
Vix una sospes navis ab ignibus.'
Horatius Flaccus.

'ATTACK enemy's centre and van;' the multi-coloured string of flags fluttered from the masthead of the *Vanguard* late in the afternoon of August 1st, 1798. The day had been fresh and overcast and as the long shadows of the advancing British ships lengthened across the ruffled waters of Aboukir Bay, darker clouds were massing in the east behind the thirteen French ships anchored in a semi-circle in the shadow of the land.

At Aboukir, the Bay has a white sandy shore and a mile out a dark patch of water with the outline of a young chicken covers what is called the inner shoal. The shoal itself was impassable for a line of battleship of 1798; and in the opinion of the French Admiral his fleet anchored against it on the outside

were immune from attack save from the seaward flank.

The wind, blowing from the north-west, bore the British Fleet in a confused and crowded mass towards their adversaries and it was upon the wind that Nelson's plan depended. By their attack on the enemy's centre and van the fourteen British ships were to concentrate upon the first seven French vessels so that each Frenchman would be engaged by two adversaries at once. The attack was to be directed from the seaward side of the French line to avoid running against the shoal. And the wind, which speeded the British on, would, Nelson calculated, prevent the hindermost of the enemy's Fleet from weighing anchor and sailing up to the help of their comrades.

'Form line of battle as convenient,' spoke the *Vanguard*. It was convenient to race, carrying every stitch of canvas, for the lead. Captain Foley's *Goliath* bore ahead and just as the sun sank behind the French ships at half-past six, her guns thundered out the first salvo.

At that very instant Captain Foley saw a thing that startled him. The leading French ship's anchor buoy was not on its seaward side but bobbing between ship and shoal. Clearly there was still deep water between the French Fleet and the shallows; and where a Frenchman could swing at anchor a British ship might sail. Captain Foley turned the *Goliath* to the *inside* of the enemy line.

One by one four of the ships behind him followed in between the French Fleet and the shoal; and as the remaining British ships drew up on their outer side, the French centre and van had been, thanks to Captain Foley's daring move, sandwiched between its enemies. 'The loss of our squadron,' lamented Villeneuve (who commanded the hapless ships anchored in the rear), 'was decreed the moment that the English ships doubled our van.'

The swift southern night draped a back cloth behind the flashes of a thousand cannon. Its silence was rent by a babel of discords. The shriek and moan of metal flying through the air, the rip of iron balls upon splintered wood, the cries of mangled seamen and the cheers of the victors as the red flames licked their enemies ships, drowned the ceaseless boom of waves unseen.

On the British ships they swabbed the barrels of their guns, rammed home the charges and the balls, laid linstocks to touch-holes and sluiced down the red-hot iron in a swiftly measured sequence. But the French fire was ragged and seemed to be without heart. On the shoal side of their ships, there were few guns, and the decks were cluttered with all the rubbish dumped there, since no attack from that side had been foreseen. Within twelve minutes of the *Goliath's* opening broadside the masts of one French ship were level with her deck; two others were dismasted before ten more minutes had gone.

As it grew darker, four horizontal lights appeared on each British masthead to tell the gunners which was friend and which was foe.

The fight went on. At half-past eight the first French ships struck. Almost at the same instant a heavy bundle of scrap iron called a landridge shot, came hurtling upon the *Vanguard's* quarter-deck. Nelson was in the act of looking over a plan of the Bay when the shot smote him over the forehead and cut away a large triangular piece of skin which dropped across his remaining eye. He fell stunned and bathed in blood upon his quarter-deck.

'I am killed; remember me to my wife,' he sighed, as his captain, Edward Berry, lifted him up.

But by the time they had carried him into the cock-pit, he had won back his confidence. 'No,' he said, as the surgeon hurried up to him, 'I will take my turn with my brave fellows.' He lay waiting his turn under the low beams where swinging lanterns threw a sickly light upon the horrors of the little stench-filled chamber. The wounded and the dying were heaped together on blood-sodden pallets of straw. Their low moans and tortured shrieks sounded more clearly than the dull roar of the guns overhead. The surgeon and his mates, red to their bare elbows, bustled forward and backward with their gleaming knives and saws, pausing now and then to toss a severed leg or bleeding hand into a wooden bucket.

At last the Admiral's own turn came. The

surgeon this time warmed his instruments at a charcoal brasier to save Nelson that vividly remembered touch of the cold steel. He began to fumble in the raw flesh and assured him that the wound was not dangerous. But the horrors of the cock-pit had had their own effect, and once again the wounded man despaired. 'Convey my dying remembrance to Lady Nelson,' he groaned to the surgeon. The surgeon urged him to keep quiet and had him taken away astern of the lower deck to the bread room.

Ship by ship, the British thundered their way along the French line, leaving a trail of blazing wreckage, drifting spars, and the bobbing heads of drowning men in the fire-light behind them. At last, they drew level with the mighty flagship, *Orient*, with its hundred and twenty guns and crew a thousand strong. Broadside after broadside tore its way into her massive timbers. Six British ships fired into her at the same time. Three of her boats flared up like torches as they lay on her deck and her seamen flung the blazing pieces hissing into the sea. Shortly after nine, flames broke out again from her poop. They were smothered for a moment, only to re-appear amidships, leaping up the rigging, running along the deck. There were fire buckets hanging ready, but none could bring them up in face of such a terrific fire as swept her decks. The French Commander was killed, even as he commanded. *Sauve qui peut* – the flames licked round the

magazine. Men threw themselves overboard from the doomed ship like rats. At last, it was nearly eleven o'clock, the end came with a terrific burst of noise that shook the timbers of every ship around, and in a sheet of flame the hapless *Orient* shivered into a million pieces. The fury of the combat was stilled by the immense catastrophe. A sudden silence fell upon the troubled waters and friend and foe stood rooted to their posts, while a last shower of sparks tumbled waterward and vanished in the dark sea.

Silence dropped upon the *Vanguard*, and Nelson started up in the bread-room, where Edward Berry brought the news. His dismay forgotten in his triumph, he allowed the Captain to help him on deck. Officers, seamen and marines, were standing in silence, along the taffrail. The sudden hush had spread to every ship, and the only boat still intact upon the British flagship put off, at Nelson's command, to take from the wreckage of the *Orient* such as might still survive.

For ten long minutes the firing ceased. Then an obstinate French gun loosed a defiant shot and slowly the gigantic symphony of the battle recreated itself.

All through the darkness the rearmost of the French ships fought hopelessly on. Their yards, rigging, masts, were shot away; hulls were riddled, their gunners killed beside the fragments of their useless guns. One by one they struck. A pale

dawn came up over Africa as the echoes of their last forlorn shots died away.

At six o'clock, two French ships aground on the shoal drew a spasmodic burst of gunfire from two of their English pursuers and in a few minutes the tricolours fluttered down.

Well into the morning a last violent detonation startled nerves overwrought with the strain of the long night's battle, and it was seen that one of the French frigates had just been fired by her own crew.

The sun rose to its zenith and a great French ship suddenly began to lumber landwards under a solitary rag of sail. She drove steadily on before the startled eyes of the watchers, until she crashed against the shore, her masts shivered and snapped and she lay a helpless hulk upon the beach.

Alone, out of the whole French Fleet, the *Généreux* and the *Guillaume Tell* with two flanking frigates sailed away to the westward late that afternoon. Ten of their consorts rode, torn and battered, under the White Ensign; five others, with over four thousand Frenchmen, lay fathoms deep in the green water, where blind crabs toiled over the rotting timbers of Cleopatra's Argosies and the bleached bones of men who died at Actium.

* * * * *

The English losses killed and wounded in the battle were less than nine hundred men. Knowing that his surgeons could deal with the situation on board the ships, Nelson opened negotiations with

the French troops on shore for the removal of the enemy wounded to their own hospitals in return for which fresh vegetables and onions were obtained for his ships' crews.

The presence of a French garrison ashore, however, could not restrain the Arabs from cutting the throats of French castaways as they were thrown up by the waves, nor withold the Spanish and Italian conscripts from deserting to the victors. All through the night of August 1st, the Naval pyrotechnics had been watched from the shore by crowds of fascinated Moslems, and when the result became known hundreds of hastily kindled bonfires, fed with fragments of the vanquished fleet, picked out the northern coastline.

Before the afternoon of August 2nd, Nelson's mind had evoked its evangelical associations. 'Almighty God having blessed his Majesty's arms with victory,' ran his Memorandum to the respective Captains of the Squadron, 'the Admiral intends returning public thanksgiving for the same at two o'clock this day, and he recommends every ship doing the same as soon as convenient.'

The Admiral's duty to his God having thus been fulfilled (albeit somewhat cursorily) his mind directed itself to his duty towards his neighbours to whom, in a second and longer Memorandum, he pointed out that 'it must strike forcibly every British seaman how superior their conduct is when in discipline and good order to the riotous behaviour

of lawless Frenchmen.' 'The Squadron may be assured,' he ended, 'that the Admiral will not fail with his despatches to represent their truly meritorious conduct in the strongest terms to the Commander-in-Chief.'

But just as after St. Vincent, so now also, the Admiral's representations were to be subject to his own requirements. For he was uncomfortably alive to the really vital factor in the action just concluded – that to Captain Foley and not to himself rightly belonged the credit of the audacious and decisive manoeuvre that had made victory so overwhelming. Accordingly, Nelson failed to refer at all to the passing between the enemy's line and the shoal in his official letter to the Commander-in-Chief. But he referred the Commander-in-Chief to his personal friend and Flag-Captain, Edward Berry, the bearer of the letter, for, 'every information relative to the victory.'

What the tenor of Edward Berry's unofficial information was, posterity will deduce from his conduct when he arrived in London.

Like Captain Locker, after St. Vincent, Captain Berry became a publicity agent for Nelson and published at once an 'Authentic Narrative of the Proceedings of his Majesty's Squadron under the command of Rear-Admiral Sir Horatio Nelson' in the *True Briton* and *Sun* newspapers. He followed this up, more significantly still, by issuing his 'Authentic Narrative' in pamphlet form. (It may

be conjectured who bore the expense of such publications).

The narrative, which dealt in considerable detail with events before, during and after the battle, described the shoal manoeuvre as follows:

'The position of the enemy presented the most formidable obstacle, but the Admiral viewed these with the eye of a seaman determined on attack and it instantly struck his eager and penetrating mind that where there was room for an enemy's ship to swing there was room for one of ours to anchor.'

Thus the public was led to believe that the whole credit belonged to Nelson; thus poor Foley, whose name was not mentioned, learnt the uses of advertisement.

The inaccuracy of Berry's narrative at this point was made clear both from the more impartial account of the battle given by Captain Miller of the *Theseus* (one of the ships in the van), and from the signal logs of the British Fleet.

'At 6.40,' wrote Miller, 'the Admiral made the signal to engage the enemy close, the *Goliath* passing round, and raking the enemy's van-ship, brought up with her stern anchor inside of and abreast their second ship.' There is no hint at all that Nelson inspired the manoeuvre. Nor is it easy to understand from the position of the *Vanguard* at 6.40, when she was some distance back in the British line, how Nelson could have seen for

himself as Edward Berry suggests that there was room to sail between the French line and the shoal. The *Vanguard* could only have obtained such information through a signal from one of the leading ships and no such signal is to be found in the logs.

According to the Annual Register of 1798 (the note first appears in 1800), 'the passing around the bow of the enemy's van and inside of their line appears to have originated with the leader, Captain Foley, as no signal was made to direct such manoeuvre.'

Foley's move seems to have been foreshadowed by him in conversation on the night before the battle: 'It had long been a favourite idea with Captain Foley, which he had mentioned on the preceding evening to Captains Troubridge and Hood that a considerable advantage would arise if the enemy's fleet were moored in line of battle in with the land to lead between them and the shore, as the French guns on that side were not likely to be manned or to be ready for action.'

Long after his death, Foley found a champion in General Sir James Napier, who strongly pressed his claims nearly forty years after the battle. 'Lord Nelson was not the man who proved the adventure,' wrote Napier in the *United Service Journal*, August, 1837, 'the exploit was achieved by Sir Thomas Foley. He it was in this critical moment who saw that there was room to pass between the shore and the enemy's fleet and though the orders of Lord

Nelson were to attack the French line on the *outward* side, Foley against those orders passed *inside*, between the enemy's ships and the shore.'

* * * * *

After the Battle of St. Vincent Nelson had sent a captured Admiral's sword to the Mayor of Norwich. Now, after a bigger victory, he sent another sword to a bigger town and requested 'the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor of London,' that 'the City of London will honour me by the acceptance of it as a remembrance that Britannia still rules the waves, which that she may ever do is the fervent prayer of your Lordship's most obedient servant, Horatio Nelson.'

On the same day, August 8th, he sent Sir William Hamilton a letter. 'Almighty God,' it began, 'has made me the happy instrument in destroying the enemy's fleet, which I hope will be a blessing to Europe. You will have the goodness to communicate this happy event to all the courts in Italy, for my head is so indifferent that I can scarcely scrawl this letter.' He added the triumphant postscript: 'I have intercepted all Bonaparte's despatches going to France. His army is in a scrape and will not get out of it.'

There was 'so much bombast' in these despatches that Nelson found it 'difficult to get near the truth,' and they were written 'in such a scrawl' that 'no one not used to it can read.' But luckily they

found a man 'who had wrote in his office to decipher them.' The letters foreshadowed the writer's ambitions to become what he called the Washington of France, and showed how he had been squabbling with his Generals and was trying to 'organise Egypt as a French possession.' Light was thrown too on this latter venture by the discovery that the hapless *Orient* had had on board six hundred thousand pounds in ingots of gold and diamonds with which to bribe the recalcitrant Beys and start an Imperial coinage.

'If the Grand Signor will but *trot* an army into Syria, Bonaparte's career is finished,' Nelson assured his Commander-in-Chief. 'Four hours with four bomb-vessels would set all in a blaze and we know what an army is without stores. As to myself, I know I ought to give up for a little while, my head is splitting at this moment.'

Finally, despite the splitting head, he sat down to write to a woman – to Emma! 'My dear Lady Hamilton, you will soon be able to see the wreck of Horatio Nelson. May it count upon a kindly judgment. Its scars are marks of honour.'

Sir William Hamilton poured his heart out when the news reached Naples. 'It is impossible for any words to express in any degree the joy that the account of the glorious and complete victory occasioned at this Court and in this city . . . History either ancient or modern, does not record an action that does more honour . . . You may

well conceive, my dear Sir, how happy Emma and I are in the reflection that *it is you our bosom friend* who has done such wondrous good in having humbled these proud robbers and vain boasters.'

The Queen of Naples and Lady Hamilton had both fainted when the news came through. On being brought round, Maria Carolina kissed her husband and her children, and embraced everyone in the room, exclaiming, 'Oh, brave Nelson! Oh, God bless and protect our brave deliverer! Oh, Nelson, what do we not owe to you! Saviour of Italy! Oh, that my swollen heart could now tell him personally what we owe to him!' 'This total defeat of the regicide fleet,' she told her Ambassador in London, 'is owing to the valour and courage of this brave Admiral. The brave Nelson is wounded, he has the modesty never to speak of it. Recommend the hero to his master; he has made every Italian an enthusiast for the English Nation. All the world is mad for joy.'

And that night, when the Royal emotions were at rest and the fairy lights twinkled from Pozzuoli to Portici, Emma took out the brown writing case (that still lies, to-day, blotted and faded in a Naval Museum) and in her ragged, sprawling writing, penned her hero a note:

'My dear, dear Sir,

'What shall I say to you? 'Tis impossible I can write, for since last Monday I am delirious with joy and assure you I have a fevour caused by agita-

tion and pleasure. God what a victory! Never, never has there been anything half so glorious. I fainted when I heard the glorious news and fell on my side and am hurt but now well of that. I should feel it a glory to die in such a cause. No I would not like to die till I see and embrace the victor of the Nile . . . We are preparing your apartment against you come I hope it will not be long . . . For God's sake come to Naples soon . . . And rejoin your ever sincere and oblidged friend Emma Hamilton.'

'P.S. My dress from head to foot is all a-Nelson. Even my shawl is blue with gold anchors all over. My earrings are Nelson's anchors. In short we are be-Nelsoned all over.'

There is no record of a letter from Fanny.

CHAPTER VII

THE WORLD WELL WON

1798. · *August – October*

'Cheer! cheer! from roof and tower,
London Town!
When King George shall ride in state
From St. James's Royal Gate,
And to all the world relate
Our renown.'

Naval Ballad.

At a quarter-past eleven on the morning of Wednesday, October 2nd, a joyous peal of bells and the discharge of the guns in Hyde Park and at the Tower gave London news of the victory. The streets immediately filled with cheering crowds whose shouts and huzzahs were constantly drowned by the rattle of musketry as the various volunteer corps in the Metropolis turned out to fire a *feu-de-joie*. The loyal tradesmen of Bermondsey were so pleased with their patriotic volley in the public streets that they immediately subscribed fifty guineas to Lloyd's Fund for the widows and orphans of those killed in the engagement. The windows of pacifists and

dissenters were loyally stoned. Mr. Charles James Fox announced that he would not go to the House that day.

As soon as the early October dusk fell, candles appeared at every casement. At Drury Lane, a vast audience applauded Miss Powell (Emma's one time fellow servant) as Leonora in 'The Revenge.' But even Mr. Kemble could not hold his public that night. The whole house roared for Rule Britannia and the quartet obediently struck up:—

'Again the tributary strain
Of grateful Britons let us raise;
And to the heroes of the main
Triumphant add a Nelson's praise.
Though the "great nation" proudly boasts
Herself invincible to be,
Yet our brave Nelson still can prove
Britannia mistress of the sea.'

Somebody in the gallery 'called frequently in a boisterous manner' for 'Britons Strike Home'; till he was silenced by someone else yelling from the opposite side, 'Why, damn it, they have, haven't they?'

Every large building was festooned in fairy lights. Fladong's Coffee House – the great Naval Rendezvous – in Oxford Street displayed the initials 'H.N.' suspended from a knot, star and anchor all in lights and festooned with variegated lamps. A chaise drove along the Strand, lit up within, containing

three ladies with large cocades in their hair, driven by postillions holding lighted flambeaux. 'The Metropolis was one blaze of illumination and nothing could surpass the hilarity of those who ventured abroad to see it.'

Of the latter, there could be little doubt. Outside the Admiralty, where the crowd was greatest, every well-dressed person was made to take off his hat to them. Six officers who refused to do so were set upon and drew their swords. 'It was understood that several persons were wounded.' Five men appeared next morning at Bow Street charged with 'firing guns and pistols in the streets to the great annoyance of the inhabitants'; and 'in view of the many accidents and injuries' the Parish Constables and the Bow Street Patrol were instructed to take up all persons so disporting themselves.

All the same, on Wednesday an officer of the Guards fell foul of the crowd at the Admiralty, and 'would probably have been murdered' but for the intervention of a corporal, who was stabbed in the knee while rescuing his superior. Another gentleman was wounded by a pistol ball fired into his carriage. But

> 'Things like that you know must be
> After a famous victory.'

King George was down at Weymouth enjoying the new sea-bathing. At a Gala Performance at the Theatre, he listened to an actor declaiming:

'Nelson! thy name from shore to shore shall ring,
Joy to the Nation! Joy to England's King!
Such prowess every tribute justly craves,
E'en Arabs shout "Britannia rules the waves."
Fleets led to battle by such men as these,
Shall fix in Brunswick's hands the trident of the seas';

after which a transparency revealed Britannia 'treading Anarchy and Rebellion under the feet,' while the audience sang 'God save the King' to the strains of the Band of the Berkshire Militia.

At Burnham Thorpe they rang the bells of All Saints Church and all the village made holiday. A sheep was roasted whole before a crowd of sweating rustics, while ale and cider flowed in buckets. The Burnham Alph Band was in attendance and a local vocalist struck up:

'Now let us all with cheerful song
Give glory to our Heavenly King;
Salvation to our God belongs,
Through His protection we can sing –
Rule Britannia, Britannia rules the waves,
Britons never, never, never shall be slaves.'

They kept up the junketting at the *Pitt's Arms* late into the night, where, after everybody had roared the hunting song '*Chuck in your half-crowns*,' Squire Martin threw a guinea on the table to see how many half-crowns would be laid to it for the benefit of the

families of those who had been killed or disabled in the late glorious conflict. 'Gentlemen and neighbours,' quoth Squire Martin, 'having taken the liberty of promoting a subscription from the company at the *Pitt's Arms* for the families of those killed or disabled in the glorious victory obtained by our gallant townsman, Admiral Nelson, the sum of three pounds nineteen shillings and sixpence has been entrusted to my care and I shall transmit it to the Committee in London.'

Meanwhile at the Admiralty, Spencer was writing to felicitate Nelson; 'Most sincerely and cordially do I congratulate you on the very brilliant and signal service you have performed to your country in the glorious action of the 1st August last which most certainly has not its parallel in Naval History . . . God bless you my dear Sir Horatio and continue to crown your services with success.'

Lady Spencer expressed with less restraint the tremendous wave of relief that was sweeping London now that the French Fleet was definitely destroyed. 'Joy, joy, joy to you, brave, gallant immortalised Nelson. May that great God, Whose cause you so valiantly support, protect and bless you to the end of your brilliant career. All, all that I can say must fall short of my wishes.'

But the adjectives were only just beginning to flow. On October 3rd, Nelson's letter with the captured French sword was read to the enthusiastic Aldermen and Common Councillors of the City of

London at Guildhall assembled. Amid tumultuous applause, the sword was ordered to be placed among the City Regalia. The Court then resolved 'that a sword of the value of two hundred guineas be presented to Rear-Admiral Nelson as a testimony of the high esteem we entertain of his public services to this City and to the whole Empire.' The proceedings were rounded off by their resolve to confer upon Captain Berry the Freedom of the City in a gold box 'of the value of a hundred guineas.'

Even the Irish Parliament at Dublin paused in its daily hurly-burly (there was a rebellion on at the time) to express its thanks to the Victor of the Nile.

On October 6th, the *London Gazette* announced the creation of Sir Horatio Nelson to the dignity of Baron by the style and title of 'Baron Nelson of the Nile and' (somewhat incongruously) 'of Burnham Thorpe in the County of Norfolk' to hold to him and the heirs male of his body. It was not, however, the form, but the extent of the dignity that annoyed Nelson and his friends. After St. Vincent, Sir John Jervis had become an Earl; after Camperdown, Admiral Duncan had become a Viscount. Each of these gentlemen had had, so to speak, a double remove. The Nile was a more complete victory than St. Vincent and a more decisive one than Camperdown and was its Victor to be fobbed off with a mere Barony? The indefatigable Captain Berry (he was Sir Edward now) wrote that almost

wherever he went the words 'why not confer the same honours on Nelson as they did on Duncan' were rung in his ears.

When Parliament met in November and the King had spoken of 'the memorable and decisive action . . . of my Fleet by which an enterprise of which the injustice, perfidy, and extravagance had fixed the attention of the world . . . had been turned to the confusion of its authors,' General Walpole rather tactlessly asked the Ministers whether a higher degree of rank ought not to be conferred.

William Pitt, leader of the War Party, rose acid and angular from his place on the Treasury Bench. He deprecated, very smoothly, the raising of a question into which he thought it needless to enter. 'Admiral Nelson's fame,' he announced in one of those well-rounded platitudes with which he was wont to evade awkward questions about an Irish bribe, or a fever-rotted expedition, 'will be co-equal with the British name. It will be remembered that he has obtained the greatest Naval Victory on record when no one will think of asking whether he has been created a Baron, a Viscount or an Earl.'

To argue that such an answer contained its own refutation was beyond Whig logic, and the House proceeded by way of *solatium* to vote to the Nelson family an annual pension of £2,000.

Meanwhile, the College of Heralds was making the most of its inventive faculties in puzzling out a

coat of arms that should fittingly clothe both the Nile and Burnham Thorpe – '*A chief undulated argent thereon waves of the sea from which a palm tree issuant between a disabled ship on the dexter and a ruinous battery on the sinister. All proper.* And to his supporters, being a sailor on the dexter and a lion on the sinister, the honourable augmentations following, viz., *in the hand of the sailor a palm branch and another in the paw of the lion, both proper, with the addition of a tricolour flag and staff in the mouth of the latter.*' Someone suggested the introduction of two crocodiles, but this was probably not meant seriously.

All this time Nelson had been gathering a mixed bag of tokens of gratitude from the much relieved princes of Europe.

Selim III, his Most Imperial Majesty, the Powerful, Formidable and Most Magnificent Grand Signor – conferred upon him a diamond aigrette torn from a Royal Turban, the Chelengk or plume of triumph and a sable pelisse with broad sleeves valued at twenty-three thousand dollars. ('As the aigrette is directed to be worn, where am I to put it?' Nelson asked plaintively of Garter King at Arms, 'in my hat, having only one arm is impossible, as I must have my hand at liberty. Therefore I think on my outward garment.')

The Grand Turk's mother sent a box set with diamonds valued at £1,000.

Paul I, Czar of all the Russias, sent his portrait also set in diamonds.

The King of Sardinia (until lately of Piedmont also) sent a box likewise set with diamonds.

The King of the Two Sicilies (shortly to be confined to one of them) presented to Nelson the sword which Charles III of Spain had given to his ancestor.

The East India Company, more practically, made him the handsome present of £10,000; and the Turkey Company gave him a 'piece of plate'; and the 'Patriotic Fund' £500 with which to buy another piece of plate.

In token of its deliverance the Island of Zante produced a gold-headed cane; while Palermo voted him the Freedom of the Town in a 'gold box with a chain.'

A single day's happenings had made him a European figure. Even from distant Poland an obscure Professor wrote to establish a remote kinship, because, as he said, 'long live the great, the valiant Victor, the English Admiral Nelson, Baron of the Nile, Burnham and Tarpes, resounds with heartfelt satisfaction through the States.'

Last gift of all, a contraption of wood and iron (the *Orient's* wood and iron), was carried up to the quarter-deck. The men of the *Vanguard* gaped a little uncomfortably at the heavy uncouth object as it lay there dark and bulging on the white holystoned planking. But the Admiral, grimly impassive (he was growing strange, they thought, since the landridge shot had struck his forehead),

read in silence the letter that a seaman had given him.

'My Lord,

'Herewith I send you a coffin made of part of *L'Orient's* mainmast, that when you are tired of this life you may be buried in one of your own trophies . . .

'Your obedient and much obliged servant,

'Ben Hallowell.'

'Swiftsure.'

Everybody thought it was queer of Captain Hallowell; everybody found the Admiral's behaviour queerer. He had the thing taken to his cabin and set up behind the chair where he sat at dinner – 'with the lid on.'

It seemed that he might need it. Whilst the *Vanguard* butted her way through the equinoctial gales towards Naples, Nelson sat with throbbing head and reeling senses in the after-cabin. 'My head will not allow me to tell you half,' he wrote to Fanny. Weak with cough and fever, he dwelt morbidly upon his approaching end. The *Vanguard*, with her masts shored and her bowsprit shot to pieces, lurched heavily into the storms. The wreck of her foremast was swept overboard with four of the seamen; but they towed her on.

The Admiral had grasped success at last. Victory accomplished, wealth and honour assured, he was the envy of every man in King George's Navy. He held

the fruits of fame indeed; but they were dead sea fruits. Sick and solitary, tired and depressed, he sailed on as he thought to death, and all the demons of the evangelical cosmos were haunting his wild and clouded brain. 'I never expect my dear Lord to see your face again. It may please God that this will be the finish to that fever of anxiety which I have endured from the middle of June; but be that as it pleases His goodness, I am resigned to His will.'

On September 22nd, *Vanguard* limped with three attendant ships into the Bay of Naples. A host of sails descended like a flock of gulls upon the British squadron. The strains of 'See the conquering hero comes' floated out across the Bay. King Bignose was there with his Queen, in the Royal Barge with its great banner of vermilion silk emblazoned with the countless quarterings of his Royal Arms, and Sir William came too with Emma.

She could not contain her emotion as she ran up the companion-way and saw her pallid hero, battered and bandaged, waiting to receive her. 'O God, is it possible?' she cried, and fell fainting onto his arm.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WORLD WELL LOST

1798. *October – December*

'Let a river run with wine:
God of Youth, let this day here
Enter neither care nor fear.'
John Fletcher.

After the *Vanguard* had moored, Nelson accepted Sir William's invitation to stay at the Embassy. That night the Palazzo Sessa was illuminated and until the early hours the hero was serenaded on countless mandolins.

He wrote to Fanny as soon as his admirers left him time, as eager as ever to tell her how exceedingly he prospered. 'All Naples calls me "Nostro Liberatore"; my greeting from the lower classes was truly affecting' (Lazzeroni had released birds from cages at his approach). 'I hope some day to have the pleasure of introducing you to Lady Hamilton. She is one of the very best women in this world; she is an honour to her sex. Her kindness, with Sir William's, to me, is more than I can express; I am in their house, and I may now tell

you it required all the kindness of my friends to set me up.'

He also found time to send a hurried scrawl in a suitable strain to the white-haired parson in his Norfolk Rectory: 'The Almighty has blessed my exertions for the happiness of mankind and I am daily receiving the thanks and prayers of Turks and Christians . . . All my caution will be necessary to prevent vanity from showing itself superior to my gratitude.'

And now his birthday was approaching. He would be forty on September 29th. Lady Hamilton was preparing a gigantic party and the very thought of it excited him to the exclusion of most other things, although he still found time to write again to Fanny. 'The preparations of Lady Hamilton, for celebrating my birthday to-morrow, are enough to fill me with vanity; every ribbon, every button, has "Nelson" etc. The whole service is marked "H.N. Glorious 1st August" – songs and sonnetti are numerous beyond what I ever could deserve. I send you the additional verse to God Save the King, as I know you will sing it with pleasure.'

Then, with a dash of the old testament mentality. 'Miserable accounts of *Le Guillamme Tell*. I trust God Almighty will yet put her into the hands of our King. His all-powerful hand has gone with us to the battle, protected us and still continues destroying the unbelievers: All Glory be to God!'

At last the great day came. Seventeen hundred

and forty persons crowded into the Embassy Ballroom to dance the *saltarella* beneath the heavy gilt chandeliers. A triumphal column bore the names of the heroes of the Nile and there were flowers in profusion. When the hero entered on Lady Hamilton's arm the band burst into 'God Save the King,' and the assembled company all sang the new verse together:

'Join we in great Nelson's name,
First on the roles of Fame,
Him let us sing.
Spread we his fame around,
Honour of British ground,
Who made Nile's shores resound,
God Save the King!'

That night eight hundred sat down to supper. Cimarosa's sugary music rose and fell like the trill of an aviary of love birds. Silken dresses and wasp-waisted uniforms flitted in and out among the garden alleys against a pattern of flaming arabesques picked out by the fireworks against the velvet sky. Soft hands and seductive eyes swam around the victor of the Nile. Homage, adulation, flattery – all the things he most adored – were showered upon him in an endless cascade of glory, until the young day rose over Capri, and he was left alone with Emma. . . .

* * * * *

While their Admiral rested in the fair arms of his

admirers, the officers and men of his Majesty's ships reeled in and out of wineshops and *bagnios* almost at the very spot where Hannibal and his host was demoralised two thousand years before. But next morning, Nelson's conscience was still able to rouse him to a realisation of what was happening. It was a grim day, a heavy plume of smoke hung threatening over Vesuvius. His head pained and the memories of the night disgusted him. 'I trust my Lord,' he wrote to the Commander-in-Chief, 'in a week we shall all be at sea. I am very unwell and the miserable conduct of this Court is not likely to cool my irritable temper. It is a country of fiddlers and poets, whores and scoundrels.'

It was a passing flash of the old parsonage code of morals. The next week's pleasures turned his head again and he wrote proudly to Fanny: 'The continued kind attentions of Sir William and Lady Hamilton must ever make you and I love them, and they are deserving the love and admiration of all the world . . . My pride is being your husband, the son of my dear father, and in having Sir William and Lady Hamilton for my friends . . . I went to view the magnificent manufacture of china. After admiring all the fine things, I came to some busts in china of all the Royal Family; these I immediately ordered, and, when I wanted to pay for them I was informed that the King had directed that whatever I chose should be delivered free of all cost: it was handsome of the King.'

But he omitted to tell Fanny that the figure holding him at Naples when he should have been after Bonaparte in Egypt was not a china one! 'I am writing opposite Lady Hamilton, therefore you will not be surprised at the glorious jumble of this letter,' he ended an official dispatch. 'Our hearts and our hands must all be in a flutter: Naples is a dangerous place, and we must keep clear of it.'

St. Vincent had his suspicions. 'I thank God that your health is restored,' he told him, 'and that the luscious Neapolitan dames have not impaired it.'

Now that Bonaparte was safely bottled up with his army in Egypt, the King of Naples and his friends had suddenly become brave. There were not fifteen thousand Frenchmen left in Italy, and if the Austrians would help, it seemed possible for forty thousand Neapolitans to drive them into the sea. Austria was quite willing to help, but wanted her usual year to think it over, and, in the meantime, sent to command the Neapolitan Army one of her few unbeaten Generals (he had not yet been in action).

The Herr Feldmarschal-leutnant Freiherr Karl Mack von Leiberich (whom History calls Mack for short) still had his whole career before him. At least three epic defeats and the greatest surrender in history lay in the future. For the moment, he arrived in a white and gold uniform with five carriages, somewhat hampered by his ignorance of Italian, and made his debut at a grand field day of

the Neapolitan Army. His own side was completely surrounded by the supposed enemy in the mock battle that followed and the new Commander-in-Chief with his entire staff was captured. (It was his first command; and his first surrender). 'This fellow does not understand his business,' said Nelson dryly, when he saw what had happened.

Nelson's own part in the plan of campaign was to retake Malta for the benefit of the King of Naples; and in the middle of October (Mack was due to move in ten days) the *Vanguard* sailed east with its attendant squadron. Nelson did not take Malta, but he quarrelled with his noble and ancient ally the Portuguese Admiral (the only Portuguese commander in the Portuguese Navy) and after sending him home 'as he is no longer needed here,' himself returned in three weeks to the lures of Naples.

General Mack had not started yet, but he was just going to do so and Nelson was asked to convey part of the army by sea to Leghorn. After quarrelling with the Neapolitan General ('I was never more hurt in my life being considered by the General as a nothing'), he found his only solace in the memory and the correspondence of his beloved Emma. As soon as he could he turned again towards Naples, asking her to 'have the goodness to have the carriage waiting at the Mole,' when 'I shall have great pleasure in coming to you as soon as possible. God bless you for comforting me with your letters.'

Away in Norfolk the tale of strange doings in Naples had come to the ears of the unhappy Fanny. She was 'very uneasy and anxious, which is not to be wondered at,' and was saying that unless her husband returned home in a few months she would join him at Naples.

'Excuse a woman's tender feelings, they are too acute to be expressed,' wrote Mr. Alexander Davison (perhaps he remembered that incident in Quebec so many years before). 'I cannot help again repeating my sincere regret at your continuation in the Mediterranean,' he added, 'you must allow your best friends to express their sensations.'

Fanny at Naples! The idea did not bear consideration; especially when the whole Mediterranean world was beginning to raise a startled eyebrow at the goings on in the Palazza Sessa. Even St. Vincent in his anxiety for the welfare of his junior officer had begged that 'the fascinating Neapolitan dames' should not be allowed too near him, for 'he is made of flesh and blood and cannot resist their temptations.'

Nelson and Emma decided that Fanny must be reassured. Accordingly, the leather writing case with its gilt tooling, was brought out again and Emma sat down to write:

'Lord Nelson is adored here,and looked on as the deliverer of this country. He was unwell when first he arrived, but by nursing and asses milk he went

from Naples quite recovered . . . I need not tell your Ladyship how happy Sir William and myself are at having an opportunity of seeing our dear, respectable, brave friend return here . . . We only wanted you to be completely happy . . . Sir William desires his kind compliments to your Ladyship and to Lord Nelson's dear respected father. May God bless you and yours, my dear Madam, and believe me, your Ladyship's ever sincere friend and humble servant, Emma Hamilton.'

'Sir William is in a rage with Ministers for not having made Lord Nelson a Viscount. Hang them, I say!'

In the meantime, Mack had started and now news came through that he had also nearly finished. All roads lead to Rome and Mack, with his 'five carriages and twenty horses,' and the Neapolitan Army, had got that far without difficulty as nobody tried to stop them. But their sojourn in the Eternal City would have been too transitory for any intelligent tourist and after inviting His Holiness the Pope (at that time a prisoner in France) to 'return on the wings of the cherubim,' the Royal and Catholic Army ran away at the approach of a small French force.

'The Neapolitan officers and many of their men are run away at the sight of the enemy,' complained Nelson bitterly. 'They have not lost much honour for God knows they have but little to lose . . . All the infantry ran away and so great was their panic

that cannon, tents, baggage, military chests, all were left to the French.'

Naples was distraught: the French were already across the Frontier. 'Resource was had to the expedient of ordering orisons and prayers in the Cathedral, but these were remedies too feeble for so violent an evil.'

The populace clamoured for the heads of the traitors who had let their army run away and for arms to defend their King. 'They would suffer a Ruler who made himself a lazzarone but never lazzaroni who made themselves rulers.' The intelligent nobles and bourgeoisie were already in treacherous correspondence with the enemy.

The King and Queen consulted with the Hamiltons and Nelson as to how they could best run away. The alarming precedent of another King and Queen in somewhat similar circumstances only eight years before, who had been brought back at Varennes, was vivid in King Bignose's mind, when his loyal Neapolitans came clamouring in front of the Palace. 'They want to keep us as hostages,' said the Queen, and the King had to show himself smiling on the balcony.

Inside the Palace a hurried packing of valuables was going on. A stream of casks and bales was carried down to the foreign ships in the anchorage. They were marked biscuit and bully beef; but they contained bullion and jewels. And while this secret house moving was in hand, Nelson was

seeing to the ships. 'Most secret,' he headed his dispatch to Troubridge on December 15th. 'Things are in such a critical state that I desire you will join me without one moment's loss of time . . . The King is returned here and everything is as bad as possible. For God's sake make haste! Approach the place with caution . . . .'

The fighting Nelson of two years before seemed to have vanished. It was clearly incumbent upon him to stay at Naples to inspire its defence and stiffen its garrison with his seamen, yet he was 'mounting the dark staircase that goes into the Queen's room with a dark lantern, cutlass, pistol, etc.' so as to help a coward King leave his people in the lurch.

On December 20th, he was feverishly drafting his 'Memorandum respecting the evacuation of Naples.' 'Most secret' he scrawled at the top.

'Three barges, and the small cutter, of the *Alcmena*, armed with cutlasses only, to be at the Victoria at half-past seven o'clock precisely. Only one barge to be at the wharf, the others to lay on their oars at the outside of the rocks . . . Grapnels to be in the boats. All the other boats . . . to be armed with cutlasses and the launches with carronades . . . In case assistance is wanted by me, false fires will be burnt.

'Nelson.'

The Royal Family and its retainers were too excited and nervous to sleep. Emma never took off

her clothes for twelve nights running. Every night she 'received jewels and such clothes as might be necessary to the amount of full two million five hundred thousand pounds sterling,' and, in the middle of all the hubbub, Mack sent a note to the effect that 'he had no prospect of stopping the progress of the French' (which was certainly true). And the loyal Neapolitans murdered the King's courier whom they had mistaken for a Jacobin.

At last, on the night of December 22nd, the King and Queen and a party of ten, including Emma and Sir William Hamilton, were stumbling behind Nelson's dark lantern down a subterranean passage to the quay. The dark bulk of the *Vanguard's* barge could just be made out rocking at the wharf. It was bitterly cold and the wind cut through their cloaks as they settled themselves on the hard thwarts. As the clocks of Naples manifold churches boomed nine strokes, his Catholic Majesty and his suite stepped shivering on to the deck of the *Vanguard* and on to British soil.

That night the *Vanguard* stood out to sea. The course was set for Palermo, but the elements were Jacobin. A howling winter's wind swept the Tyrrhenian sea and ripped the *Vanguard's* sails. Once again an awkward precedent – the fate of that other King of Naples in the 'Tempest' – who also embarked upon a ship and ended his journey 'full fathom five' – may have occurred to King Bignose.

Among the groaning cargo of sea-sick notables only the one-time Welsh peasant girl carried herself like a creature of spirit. Emma was indefatigable. 'Lady Hamilton provided her own beds, linen, etc., for except one man no person belonging to Royalty assisted the Royal Family,' Nelson averred. 'Nor did her Ladyship enter a bed the whole time she was on board.' Her own account to Greville was vivid.

'All our sails torn to pieces, and all the men ready with their axes to cut away the masts and poor I to attend and keep up the spirits of the Queen, the Princess Royal, three young Princesses, a baby six weeks old and two young Princes. The King and Prince were below in the wardroom, my mother there assisting them, all their attendants being so frightened and on their knees praying.'

The Austrian Ambassador became so frightened that he threw a gold snuff box set with brilliants into the sea, because it was embellished with the portrait of his mistress as Venus (in the nude) 'for he held it impious to keep so prophane an article about his person when on the verge of eternity.'

His Britannic Majesty's Minister to the Court of the Two Sicilies sat below with a loaded pistol waiting to blow his brains out when the ship should go down.

Her fortitude in adversity revealed Emma in a new aspect to Nelson, who above everything set such store by courage. 'It is my duty,' he impressed

upon St. Vincent, 'to tell your Lordship the obligation which the Royal Family as well as myself are under on this trying occasion to Lady Hamilton.' And the mutual sympathy between these two was irrevocably knit in those perilous midnight hours on the heaving overcrowded *Vanguard* to the accompaniment of creaking yards and Royal retchings.

In the afternoon of Christmas Day, 1798, the *Vanguard* sighted Palermo. The vermilion standard of the Naples Bourbons fluttered at the maintop gallant mast; a few dazed fishermen set up a ragged cheer. But 'her Majesty could not bear to go on shore in a public manner.' For Royalty had suffered for its cowardice and the youngest of the Royal Princes 'taken with convulsions in the midst of the storm,' had died in the night.

CHAPTER IX

COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE

1799. *January – June*

'O singer of Persephone! . . .
Dost thou remember Sicily? . . .
Where Amaryllis lies in state.

* * * * *

Still by the light and laughing sea,
Poor Polypheme bemoans his fate . . .
Dost thou remember Sicily?'

Oscar Wilde.

Naples was lost. The Viceroy that King Bignose had left behind him ran away dressed as an old woman. Mack (he had no need to dress up) fled to the French camp. Dusty French columns fought their way into the city over three thousand ragged loyal bodies. From the three castles, St. Elmo on the Hill, Uovo on the Mole, and Nuovo by the Bay, fluttered the blue, red and yellow flag of the young Parthenopian Republic.

King Bignose did not worry over much. Freed from the cares of governing Naples, even badly, and with two and a half million sterling with which

to supply his needs, the Catholic Monarch was on holiday. An occasional edict forbidding ladies wearing hair cropped '*à la Brutus*' or 'wigs of a similar form' on pain of severe punishment represented the sum total of his statecraft. And revolution thus forbidden to rear its head, especially if it were a head cropped *à la Brutus*, Nelson could devote his days and nights to that which he had so skilfully won when Naples was so shamefully lost.

Among the orange groves of Palermo he did not need to respect even the slight conventions that Naples had asked of him. They lived together, all three, Sir William, Emma and Horatio in a great rambling palace of fifty rooms; and there was no one in that land, cradle of the *Commedia dell'Arte*, who failed to recognise the rôles that each had chosen to play. Emma, it is true, was becoming somewhat buxom for Columbine; but Sir William assuredly was an excellent Pantaloon; and Nelson, had he not played Harlequin before this? Besides, it was his guineas – bestowed by grateful Englishmen as the price of his battered body – that were footing the weekly bills. 'You may judge what it is to keep a table for all the poor British Immigrants from Naples and for the officers of the Fleet,' whined Sir William, now conscious that he was fast breaking up. But the table was kept, the lights glinted, servants ran, the life of an English gentleman – abroad – went its pleasant course; and the willing paymaster of it all only took from Sir William the

same payment that in his time Sir William had taken from Greville. Once more Emma had changed hands like a coin.

The effect on Nelson was electric. He plunged wildly into all the extravagances and many-coloured sins that he had so often heard denounced from the pulpit at Burnham Thorpe. The report of it spread to all the scandalised ears of Europe. In far off Vienna, Lady Minto heard how 'Nelson and the Hamiltons all lived together in a house of which he bore the expense, which was enormous, and every sort of gaming went on half the night.' Nightly the Admiral would sit with large parcels of gold before him nodding a little drowsily at the unaccustomed hours and, as the fumes of all the wine he had drunk mounted to his brain, would 'generally go to sleep.' While at the Faro table, Emma flushed and raucous snatched gold pieces from the heap and flung them on the cloth, spending as much as five hundred pounds of his money before the dawn broke.

Mr. Pryse Lockhart Gordon was travelling through Sicily just then, and he too was made welcome, with the British Immigrants, at Sir William's house. 'When we had sat a few minutes,' he said in describing what he saw, 'the Minister retired but shortly returned, and on his arm, or rather his shoulder, was leaning the Melpomene, her raven tresses floating round her expansive form and full bosom. She said she was "dying" for her beloved Naples, yet the roses on her cheeks pre-

vailed over the lilies and gave hopes that her grief would not prove fatal.'

Once introduced, Emma burst forth into a long tale of her hopes and fears and miseries 'in a mélange of Lancashire and Italian' with much about 'the dear Queen' and her charming Palazzo at Naples, with its previous contents now in the hands of 'those vile Jacobins.' She discovered herself to be Lord Montgomery's cousin and appealing to her husband said, 'A'nt us Sir William?' whereupon she pressed that nobleman to stay for dinner only regretting that 'her small house' (of fifty rooms) would not accommodate him.

At this moment Nelson 'came from a corner where he had been writing.' He asked his visitors for the latest news of Naples, 'insinuating we thought rather impertinently' that they should not have stayed there so long. Lord Montgomery replied hotly that he was very glad that he did stay, in fact that he only regretted having had to come away at all and remarked that nowadays true patriotism seemed to be extinct. The hint was not lost on Nelson. 'I observed some very significant glances pass between him and his fair friend.'

That evening Mr. Gordon found himself with Nelson before the company went in to dinner. After a few trifling enquiries he was surprised when the Admiral somewhat truculently demanded, 'Pray, sir, have you heard of the Battle of the Nile?'

'I replied with equal gravity that I had heard of

two Battles of the Nile, and that I had perhaps done more honour to them and to his Lordship than any other individual as far as wine could testify loyalty, adding that false news of the victory had come through to Pisa in July and I got a headache for nothing.'

'That battle, sir,' Nelson went on with much emphasis, 'was the most extraordinary one that was ever fought and it is *unique*, sir, for three reasons. First, for its having been fought at night; secondly, for its having been fought at anchor; and, thirdly, by its having been gained by an Admiral with one arm.'

'Had the speech been made after dinner,' commented Mr. Gordon dryly, 'I should have imagined the hero had imbibed an extra dose of champagne.'

With a lover of such a calibre Emma was at her very best; and the art of showmanship that she had learnt from the quack doctor when she was Hebe Vestina came into full play. She stage-managed him as if he were a marionette, and if he could play Harlequin when he so wished he certainly performed as Captain Terrible at her bidding. On the day when the Czar of Russia's snuff-box was officially brought to Palermo for presentation, it was announced that the messenger – a Turk – sought an audience. Emma at once told Nelson to dress up in the pelisse and plume of triumph that the Grand Signor had bestowed on him. 'This was

done in a moment.' Then, all being ready, the folding doors were flung back and the Turk permitted to enter. 'The moment he caught a glimpse of his Lordship's costume, the slave prostrated himself on the earth, making a grand salaam.'

Emma was so pleased with the Turk's appearance (although others considered him a 'savage monster') that she gave him every encouragement and even flirted with him through a Greek interpreter. The follower of the Prophet was somewhat lax in his observances and at the grand dinner that night got very drunk with rum. Suddenly, at table, he started up and drew his *shabola*. 'With this weapon I cut off the heads of twenty French prisoners in one day,' he shouted. 'Look! there is blood remaining on it.' 'O, let me see the sword that did the glorious deed,' beamed Emma delightedly. They passed it to her, and she kissed the blade. Then she gave it lovingly to Nelson. The scene was too much, we are told, for the wife of the British Consul-General ('nearing her accouchment') and she fainted on the spot.

When Lord Elgin passed through Palermo on his way out to take up the Embassy at Constantinople, the necessity of 'a change in our representative and in our conduct there' appeared to him 'most urgent.' 'You may perhaps know from Lord Grenville,' he added, 'how strong my impression on that subject is.'

Captain Troubridge, who was acting-Com-

mander of the Mediterranean Squadron while his chief dallied at Palermo, pressed Nelson to save himself while he still could. 'Pardon me, my Lord,' he wrote, 'it is my sincere esteem for you that makes me mention it. I know you can have no pleasure sitting up all night at cards; why then sacrifice your health, purse, ease, everything? . . . If you knew what your friends feel for you I am sure you would cut all the nocturnal parties. The gambling of the people at Palermo is publicly talked of everywhere.'

The Sicilians saw nothing unusual in a celebrity publicly flouting his mistress, and, early in March, 1799, the Freedom of Palermo was duly presented to Nelson in a gold box with a chain on a silver salver. He was still cheered whenever he appeared in public and was habitually seranaded by moonlight from the water. 'It was delightful to hear it,' writes a visitor, 'on fine moonlight nights from the vessels and boats that entered or crossed the Bay. The sailors used to sing many of those hymns which afterwards had such great success in England.'

Life went riotously on; but his health was less resilient than his conscience. He was perpetually ill and at times the old depression surged up again. 'Believe me,' he told Alexander Davison, 'my only wish is to sink with honour into the grave, and when I do that I shall meet death with a smile.'

Fanny had to be content that April with few letters and short ones. 'Excuse short letters,' he

told her, 'neither head nor hand can get through my business.' Yet he found time to fob off her proposal to come out to him. 'You would have seen how unpleasant it would have been had you followed any advice which carried you from England to a wandering sailor. I could, if you had come, *only* have struck my flag and carried you back again, for it would have been impossible to have set up an establishment at either Naples or Palermo.' It was well that Fanny did not yet know exactly why it would have been impossible to have set up an establishment at Palermo.

The sicker he grew the more he turned to Emma. His London Agents, Messrs. Marsh and Creed, were ordered, before investing the money that was now so plentiful with him, to purvey fifteen guineas' worth of prints of the Battle of the Nile. He bestowed upon her the 'nearly round gold box' he had from the Grand Turk's mother, and he sent urgently to the East India Company's factor at Constantinople for 'two or three very fine India shawls; the price is no object.'

Her hold over him was put to the test that very spring. Since the Battle of the Nile there had been no French Fleet in being East of the Straits. Now, through the laxity of the British blockading Brest, a French Squadron got to sea and was reported to be sailing for the Mediterranean. As soon as Nelson heard the news he ordered the ships of his command to join the Commander-in-Chief at

Minorca. But the Nelson of 1799 was not the man of 1798; and his first impulse was to send his ships without their Admiral. On May 12th he excused himself to St. Vincent, 'I am only sorry that I cannot move to your help, but this island appears to hang on my stay. Nothing could console the Queen this night (he omitted to mention Emma's views on the subject) but my promise not to leave them.' That night his poor conscience flickered somewhat and next morning he had to write another letter to say 'as I stay my heart is breaking; and to mend the matter I am seriously unwell.' None the less, on the 19th he did set out in person. Even so, he must needs write to Emma at eight o'clock that night. 'To tell you how dreary and uncomfortable the *Vanguard* appears, is only telling you what it is to go from the pleasantest society to a solitary cell; or, from the dearest friends to no friends . . .' 'You cannot conceive what I feel when I call you all to my remembrance.' On the two following days he took the opportunity to write to her again. 'Accept my sincere thanks for your kind letter. Nobody writes so well: therefore, pray, say not you write ill; for, if you do, I will say – what your goodness sometimes told me – "you l – e." I can read, and perfectly understand every word you write.' Nine days later hearing that the French were safe in Toulon, he was back at Palermo.

He was received as if he had won yet another Battle of the Nile. By the Queen he was publicly

crowned with laurel – which moved him to tears; and far into the night Palermo danced in his honour.

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While he lingered at Palermo there came great news for Sir William: 'Yesterday just as I was mounting my horse,' wrote Lord Bristol, 'arrived the glorious news that the Austrians had totally beaten those execrable highwaymen the French and laid three thousand *mm. les perruquiers* dead on the spot.' And suddenly the fickle Deity of Actium smiled in a new direction. In a night the Star of Republicanism sank into the depths and the French troops in and around Naples hurried to support their fellows everywhere flying from the Austrians. No sooner had their discomforted battalions recrossed the border of the Two Sicilies than the tide of Royalism sweeping up from the south engulfed the Parthenopean Republic and brought to the City of Naples the King's Lieutenant, Cardinal Ruffo, with his 'Christian Host of the Sacred Faith.'

Yet the Queen believed that 'things would not be brought to quietness and subordination' until the Fleet of Nelson appeared off Naples. 'She therefore begs and conjours you my dear Lord,' wrote Emma on June 12th, 'to arrange matters so as to be able to go to Naples. For God's sake consider it and do. We will go with you if you will come and fetch us. Sir William is ill; I am ill; it will do us

good. God bless you. Ever yours sincerely, E. Hamilton.'

But Nelson had other orders. His duty was not to go to Naples but to follow up the French Squadron at Toulon. Love and duty tore him by turns. 'I am agitated but my resolution is fixed,' he told Sir William. 'For Heaven's sake suffer not any one to oppose it. I am full of grief and anxiety, and I must go. It will finish the war.' This was on June 14th. A week later he finally left Palermo – for Naples. Sir William and Emma went with him.

CHAPTER X

VAE VICTIS

June 1799 – *May* 1800

'Love in fantastic triumph sate
Whilst bleeding hearts around him flow'd,
For whom fresh pains he did create
And strange tyrranic power he show'd.'
Aphra Behn.

On June 24th, 1799, Naples was quiet. The City was occupied by the Christian Host; only the three Castles were still held by the King's enemies. From St. Elmo the tricolour floated defiance. At Castles Uovo and Nuovo white flags of truce waved over two detachments of Neapolitan Republicans. At the masthead of the *Seahorse* (Captain Foote), in the bay a white flag flew also.

It was five days since Cardinal Ruffo and Captain Foote had concluded an armistice with the rebel garrisons, and only the day before that terms of capitulation had been agreed.

'The troops composing the garrisons will remain in the fortresses until such time as the ships here-

under referred to for the transportation of those individuals who desire to proceed to Toulon shall be ready to set sail' ran Article 2 thereof.

By Article 3 the garrisons 'shall march out with the honours of war, with their arms and baggage, drums beating, flags unfurled, linstocks lit, and each one with two pieces of artillery.'

From the news that he had already received when his squadron sailed into the bay on the 24th, Nelson suspected some such arrangement. The white flags and the tricolour confirmed his worst suspicions for, to his thinking, 'as to rebels and traitors no power on earth has the right to stand between their gracious King and them.' He came with full powers from their gracious King to liquidate the rebellion and with a conviction that the capitulation had been concluded 'in an infamous manner to his Sicilian Majesty.'

That same evening he wrote to Ruffo that he 'disapproved entirely of these capitulations.' The Cardinal received the letter with considerable annoyance and took his stand by the agreement of his own making. He was shown a statement wherein Nelson acquainted 'the rebellious subjects in the Castles of Uovo and Nuovo that he would not permit them to embark.' The Cardinal refused to send it on to the Castles.

On the afternoon of the 25th he came on board the flagship. Emma acted as interpreter. It was a stormy interview. 'An Admiral is no match for

a Cardinal in talking,' said Nelson. Ruffo went back in a fury; he induced his officers to sign a protest stigmatising any violation of the Treaty as 'an abominable outrage against public honour . . . holding responsible before God whoever should dare to impede its execution.'

But the old, inflexible Nelson, who so loathed all insubordination, was in control. And the Emma who had kissed French blood on a Turkish sword was at his side to see him handle a crisis. He moved the whole British Fleet of eighteen sail nearer into the Bay in close line of battle where they could command the Castles and to increase their display sent twenty-two gun and mortar vessels to the flank of the line. 'The Cardinal . . . will send the rebels to Toulon – I say they shall not go.'

In the morning of the 26th, Ruffo agreed to a compromise. He informed the besieged that though he regarded the capitulation as sacred, the Admiral refused to recognise it and gave them notice that the garrisons bearing in mind that the English held command of the sea might take whatever steps they chose.

Nelson's will had prevailed. On his formal assurance that he would not violate the *armistice* the garrisons surrendered. The armistice was not the capitulation. Nelson was quite clear in his mind that no one was under any delusion. But the prisoners to the end believed that they were surrendering on the old terms. They would not

believe that their King's lieutenants would go back on a solemn treaty and they expected to receive all the promised honours of war. They did not receive the honours of war. They were embarked on boats in the harbour to await the King's pleasure and the King's pleasure was made known two days after. So, too, was the Queen's. 'To treat with such rebels is impossible,' she declared. 'I recommend Lord Nelson to treat Naples as if it were a rebellious Irish town. I recommend the greatest firmness, rigour and severity.' The boats containing the prisoners were immediately seized and moored under the guns of the British ships and many of their occupants went back into the Castles – this time not to their battlements, but to their dungeons.

On June 29th, Ruffo handed over to Nelson a very important prisoner. Admiral Prince Francesco Caracciolo, the most efficient officer in the Neapolitan Navy, who had learnt his seamanship under Rodney and served his King with honour at the blockade of Toulon in 1793, was an old comrade and friend. He was the only Italian, if not the only foreigner, for whom Nelson had ever expressed a personal admiration. But Caracciolo, like others of the more enlightened Nobles, had sided with the revolution. Captured in disguise (he had escaped from Castle Nuovo after the capitulation), he was brought, a short, thick-set man, haggard with misery and want, before the pitiless stare of his enemies.

Nelson was cold as steel. To the highest Neapolitan Officer present he at once sent orders to 'assemble five of the senior officers under your command, yourself presiding, to enquire whether the crime with which the said Caracciolo stands charged can be proved against him and . . . if proved, to report what punishment he ought to suffer.'

The Court-Martial was hurriedly and not too regularly constituted and it sat on British soil – on Nelson's flagship.

'I am accused,' said the prisoner, 'of deserting my King in distress . . . The King deserted me and all his faithful subjects . . . but I think my destruction predetermined and this Court anything but a Court of Justice.'

It was a farcical trial, they only took two hours over the whole thing.

'Admiral Prince Caracciolo,' said the President, 'the sentence of the Court is that you be hanged at the yard-arm of your flagship and may God have mercy on your soul.' 'I take shame in asking any favour from such men,' said the prisoner, 'but, if possible, I wish to be shot, not hung up like a felon and a dog.'

'It is inadmissible,' they told him.

At nine in the morning he had been brought to Nelson's ship; at five that evening he swung at his own yard-arm. The English seamen 'clustered on the rigging like bees' to watch the show. The dead body was cut down and cast into the sea.

Nelson and the Hamiltons were dining off roast sucking pig at the time and when the Admiral's secretary, who was carving, sliced off the creature's head, Emma suddenly fainted. 'It put me in mind of my dear Caracciolo,' she sobbed. But his Britannic Majesty's Consul-General, who was present rather maliciously added that she 'ate heartily of it – even the brains.'

Within a week, Nelson completed his judicial butchery with the life of an unfortunate private in the marines – a certain John Jolly – who for the 'crime' of striking and swearing at a superior officer was shot in the presence of all the marines in the Fleet – 'in the usual manner.'

Five days later, it was safe for the King of Naples to be welcomed on the British flagship with a salvo of twenty-one guns.

'His Majesty is with *us* on board,' Emma wrote breathlessly to Greville, 'where he holds his councils and levees every day . . . We have given the King the upper cabin. Sir William and I have an apartment below in the wardroom and as for Lord Nelson, he is here there and everywhere . . . On Sunday last we had prayers on board. The King assisted and was much pleased with the order, decency, and good behaviour of the men, officers, etc.'

A young midshipman who remembered the occasion because his Majesty's cooks provided for the gun room wrote down his impressions of those

days. 'The day passed administering justice, Italian fashion, enlivened by the bombardment of St. Elmo. At noon the Royal dinner was served on the quarter-deck. Lady Hamilton played the harp at dessert. At sunset opera singers in a large decked galley came alongside.' Nelson could assure Mrs. Cadogan that 'our dear lady is perfectly well, but has her time so much taken up with excuses from rebels, jacobins and fools that she is most heartily tired.'

The festivities on board the flagship were rudely disturbed one morning when the midshipman of the watch discovered his Sicilian Majesty gazing with anxiety on some distant object. The King, all of a sudden, dropped his spyglass on deck and shrieked with horror. There, bobbing up and down on the dark green waves, was the body of Caracciolo, its white face framed in a tangled mass of hair. The King and his superstitious Court were panic-struck at this apparition from the dead; and could only be reassured in some degree when they were told by one of the more astute priests in attendance that the dead traitor had come back to ask for forgiveness and Christian burial. 'Let him have it, let him have it,' shrieked the King, hurrying away from the quarter-deck. So at long last the unfortunate patriot found a resting place in consecrated ground.

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Nelson had dealt with the embers of the rebellion,

but it was clearly not the business of his squadron to remain on permanent loan to the King of the Two Sicilies.

At the time that he was arresting the garrisons in the Castles, Lord Keith, the new Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean, ordered him to 'send such ships as you can possibly spare off the Island of Minorca to await my orders.'

To this dispatch Nelson wrote an equivocal answer that 'as soon as the safety of his Sicilian Majesty's Kingdoms is secured I shall not lose one moment in making the detachment you are pleased to order'; and he took no steps to obey.

Life was far too delicious that flaming July in the Bay for him to want to leave it. His ship, at once his own domain and a Royal Palace, Emma constantly at his side, flattery all round and the sense of power, were irresistible bonds. Besides, with the coming of prosperity, his private affairs were growing pleasantly complicated. The Ten Thousand Pounds voted by the East India Company had just come in and he was always generous to his friends.

'I rejoice that you gave Mr. Bolton the money and I wish it made up to five hundred,' he wrote to Fanny. 'I never regarded money nor wanted it for my own use, therefore, as the East India Company have made me so magnificent a present I beg that two thousand of it may be disposed of in the following manner: Five hundred pounds to my father, five

hundred to Mr. Bolton, and let it be a godsend without any restriction, five hundred to Maurice and five hundred to William. And if you think my sister would be gratified do the same for her.'

But Keith was pressing. 'I judge it necessary that . . . the force under your Lordship's orders should quit Sicily and repair to Minorca.'

Nelson replied 'Unless the French are at least drove out of Capua I think it right not to obey your Lordship's order . . . it is better to save the Kingdom of Naples and risk Minorca than to risk Naples to save Minorca.'

'Your Lordship is hereby required and directed to repair to Minorca,' Keith insisted (he was beginning to show his teeth), 'as I shall in all probability have left the Mediterranean before your Lordship will receive this.' He added a private note that was to become significant: 'Advise those Neapolitans not to be too sanguinary. Cowards are always cruel.'

In face of this peremptory order and of this definite hint, Nelson found himself compelled to act and ordered four ships to Minorca – he did not go with them.

By staying he was able to enjoy the anniversary of the Battle of the Nile. At one p.m. on the first of August a salute of twenty-one guns was fired by every ship in the Bay and the Royal Family overwhelmed 'the defender of the Two Sicilies' with 'the sincerest thanks and vows for your future happiness.'

The King dined on board Nelson's flagship, and in the evening there was a general illumination.

'A large vessel was fitted out like a Roman galley. On its oars was fixed lamps and in the centre was erected a rostral column with my name. At the stern were elevated two angels supporting my picture. In short, my dear Fanny, the beauty of the whole was beyond my powers of description. More than two thousand variegated lamps were suspended round the vessel. An orchestra was fitted up and filled with the very best musicians and singers. The piece of music was in a great measure to celebrate my praise, describing their previous distress "but Nelson came, the invincible Nelson, and they were preserved and again made happy." This must not make you think me vain.'

On August 5th, his ship weighed anchor, and with the King and the Hamiltons aboard set off for Palermo, where they were received 'with that joy which a loyal people must always pay to a beloved sovereign.' The Queen came out with the whole town to meet them. More balls, suppers and illuminations ensued.

'The Queen has prepared my cloathes,' Emma told Greville excitedly. For Nelson himself there were greater things in store.

Two days later, 'his Majesty desirous of giving public and lasting proof and transmitting to future generations the illustrious remembrance of your merits and glory . . . resolved and ordained that the

ancient town of Bronte, its territories and dependencies be constituted a feudal tenure and be raised to the dignity of a Duchy with full and mixed authority and the said Duchy, its revenues and jurisdiction be conferred on Your Excellency and the heirs of your body in a right line.'

The revenue of the new Duchy was estimated at three thousand pounds a year. 'I shall not lose the opportunity of being useful to my family,' Nelson at once wrote. 'It shall go first to you, my dear father, and for your natural life the estate shall be taxed with five hundred pounds a year.' 'I am determined on one thing,' he told Davison, 'that the inhabitants shall be the happiest in all his Sicilian Majesty's Dominions.'

Summer wore into autumn. He was Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean now that Keith was gone, but he was 'almost blind and truly very unwell.' 'I hope to rub through the winter, by which time the war will be concluded,' he told Fanny, 'I never expect to see even Bronte . . . If the print of Orme and the other of Boarding the *San Nicholas* are out I wish for two or three for this house, also a few of the late caricatures. A good laced hat and a plain one will be very acceptable.'

And he had even greater trials. Unable to overcome the fatal attraction at Palermo, he could neither press the interminable blockade of Malta, nor adequately follow out his design that not a Frenchman should leave Egypt.

Early in that fatal autumn a Frenchman did leave Egypt. A frigate carrying a small group of officers successfully felt its way across the Mediterranean to the Port of Fréjus, and on October 9th, 1799, Bonaparte once more set foot on French soil. The crowning mercy of the Battle of the Nile had been unfulfilled. 'I have regretted sincerely the escape of Bonaparte,' Nelson admitted, when they told him, 'but . . . no blame lies at my door.' His conscience troubled him.

'I am heartily tired of war. I am fagged and tired out,' he told Fanny. (That very day he had given orders that a boatswain's mate who had seized a lieutenant by the collar and expressed a wish to have that officer on shore, should be hanged at the fore-yard-arm 'in the usual manner').

Yet for all his public trouble there was one private consolation – Fanny still thought the best of him whatever rumours she had heard. But that November he was thoroughly frightened when she told him that she was 'ordered to Lisbon by the physician attending me.' With Fanny at Lisbon he could not in decency remain with Emma at Palermo. 'Whatever physicians say about Lisbon I cannot conceive the most dirty place in Europe covered with filth can be wholesome. I would rather find a house in the worst part of Portsmouth.'

To keep her mind off this new idea he talked of their future plans, buoying her up with the tale of his homecoming. He had already written of their

home, 'supposing my pension is handsome.' 'Think if Roundwood pleases you. We must have a good dining-room and bedchamber, and if we have money a neat house near Hyde Park on no account on the other side of Portman Square. Baker Street I detest.' Now he reverted to the subject of their fortune and went over every source of income for her benefit. 'From Bronte it is not my intention to take money. It shall be made the happiest place in Europe. I hope to make Sicily bless the day I was placed amongst them.'

With masterly finesse he asked his friend Captain Hardy when that officer returned to England to tell Fanny that he would be grateful if she would send Lady Hamilton a Christmas present in token of that Lady's kindness to himself and Josiah.

Fanny did as she was told. 'Captain Hardy told me you would be grateful if I sent Lady Hamilton anything,' she wrote (it was Boxing Day, 1799), 'therefore I shall send her Ladyship a cap and kerchief such as are worn this cold weather.' She took the occasion to trouble him with that domestic gossip that she loved. 'I have ordered a suit of clothes for her Majesty's birthday. I am frightened to tell you the expense of your new chariot, nothing fine about it, only fashionable, £352 harness etc. for one pair of horses.'

The present duly arrived and Fanny hoped 'that Lady Hamilton will like her cap. All I can say it's the whim of the moment. You will be aston-

ished,' she added, 'to find how expensive everything is grown since you left England . . . So many new fashions about visiting that were I to attempt to give you an idea it would fill a sheet.'

It was no wonder that there were many new fashions, for the seemingly eternal eighteenth century was dead at last and the new, slightly vulgar, commercialised nineteenth century had entered to the roar of cannonades and the ebb and flow of ancient frontiers. The new age brought Bonaparte to command France and Vice-Admiral Keith, K.B., back to command the Mediterranean. And it brought also the Honourable Arthur Paget to represent King George at the Court of the Two Sicilies in the place of old Sir William Hamilton.

Nelson met Keith at Leghorn. The latter was frigidly polite. He thought it as well to keep to himself the conclusions to which they had come about Emma, Caracciolo, Bonaparte and sundry other matters in London. They sailed for Palermo together.

This time there were no fêtes. 'Having a Commander-in-Chief,' wrote Nelson bitterly to Lady Hamilton, 'I cannot come on shore till I have made my manners to him. Times are changed . . . it has been no fault of mine that I have been so long absent. I cannot command and now only obey.'

Times were indeed changed, as Sir William, too, was learning. 'I have after thirty-six years service at this Court,' he complained to Nelson, 'been either

kicked up or down out of my post. It gives much uneasiness at this Court and poor Emma is in the greatest distress.'

Keith spent eight days at Palermo and he found them quite long enough for his enquiries. 'The whole was a scene of fulsome vanity and absurdity all the long eight days I was at Palermo,' he wrote.

Paget drew the same conclusions. 'I am sorry to say,' he wrote to Grenville, 'that Lord Nelson has gone more or less into all this nonsense. His Lordship's health is, I fear, sadly impaired and I am assured that his fortune is fallen into the same state in consequence of great losses which both his Lordship and Lady Hamilton have sustained at Faro and other games of hazard.'

On February 11th Keith bore Nelson away with him to the uncongenial atmosphere of Malta which he proceeded to invest with his ships. It was not a pleasant time for the hero of the Nile. But Fate was kind.

On February 18th he was fortunate enough to fall in with a French line of battleships. It was the old Nelson who came on to the quarter-deck when his first lieutenant cried out 'Deck there, the stranger is a line of battleship, my Lord – she is going large on the starboard tack.'

'Ah, an enemy, Mr. Stains. I pray God it be *le Généreux*. The signal for a general chase, Sir Ed'ard (Berry).'

Full sail they sped forward, gaining upon their quarry.

'It is certainly *le Généreux* and to my flagship she can alone surrender. Get the engine to work, on the sails, pipe the hammocks down and each man place shot in them. Slack stays, knock up the wedges and give the masts play.' And Nelson began to swing the stump of his arm, as he always did when he was excited.

'The Admiral is working his fin, do not cross his hawse, I advise you,' said a passing seaman as he bustled to quarters and heard Nelson swear boisterously at a wretched midshipman at the look-out.

'I'll knock you off your perch, you rascal, if you are so inattentive. Sir Ed'ard send your best quarter-master to the weather wheel. A strange sail ahead of the chase.'

There were other ships after *le Généreux* as well and Nelson was always jealous of glory.

'Youngster to the masthead. What, going without your glasses and be damned to you! Let me know who she is immediately.' Up ran the midshipman to identify the English ship and it was the expected news that he shouted down.

'A sloop of war or frigate, my Lord.'

'Demand her number.'

'The *Success*, my Lord.'

'Captain Peard, signal to cut off the flying enemy – great odds, though – thirty-two small guns to eighty large ones.'

'The *Success* has hove-to athwart-hawse of *le Généreux* and is firing her larboard broadside. The Frenchman has hoisted his tri-colour with a rear-Admiral's flag,' yelled the boy at the look out.

'Bravo – *Success* at her again.'

'She has wore round, my Lord, and is firing her starboard broadside. It has winged her, my Lord – her flying kites are flying away altogether. The enemy is close on the *Success* who must receive her tremendous broadside.'

(There was a great cloud of smoke and a crash as the poor *Success* lurched under the broadside and lay there crippled.)

'The signal for the *Success* to discontinue the action, and come under my stern,' said Nelson. 'She has done well for her size. Try a shot from the lower deck at her Sir Ed'ard.'

'It goes over her.'

'Beat to quarters and fire coolly and deliberately at her masts and yards.'

But *le Généreux* had also opened fire; and her shot passed singing through the mizzen stay sail. They were really in action now and Nelson was so confident that the fears of twelve year old midshipmen could amuse him and he patted one of the youngsters on the head and asked jocularly how he relished the music. But it was not an equal fight for long; another English ship came up, and the tri-colour fluttered hopelessly down.

'The signal to discontinue firing, Sir Ed'ard.'

Slowly the smoke clouds drifted away. The seas were silent again. The prize was indeed *le Généreux* – one of the only two French battleships that had escaped the Nile and only *le Guillaume Tell* now remained.

Even this successful action caused friction and the relationship between Nelson and his superior officer was becoming intolerable. 'Had you seen the way the Peer received me, I know not what you would have done; but I can guess,' Nelson wrote to Lady Hamilton while he and Keith were squabbling as to who should take the credit for capturing *le Généreux*. But it was Keith who sent the official account. Nelson had to content himself with a private letter to Lord Spencer at the Admiralty; and in that quarter he was no longer viewed very favourably.

While his letter to Spencer was still on the way, he was back at his old game of disobeying Keith's orders. He had been ordered to take command off Malta and Keith had significantly stigmatised Palermo in his orders as 'an inconvenient place of rendez-vous.'

The very day the new orders came, Nelson wrote to Keith that 'my state of health is such that it is impossible I can much longer remain here . . . I must therefore . . . request your permission to go to my friends at Palermo for a few weeks.'

And a fortnight later, since Keith still proved obdurate, he announced 'my health continues to

be so very indifferent that I am obliged to retire to Palermo for a few weeks.'

On March 16th, after leaving his ship, he was back once more in Emma's arms.

'Great changes are going on and none that I see for the better,' he complained once safely lodged with the Hamiltons. '*We of the Nile* are not equal to Lord Keith in his estimation and ought to think it an honour to serve under such a *clever* man.'

But within two days there was yet more gall to his cup. His ship suddenly came in sight of Palermo with news of a great success. The whole town hurried down to the waterside, the Queen and Nelson among the rest. The Royal Party were rowed out to the ship whose rigging and torn shrouds showed signs of having been in action.

'All hands man ship. Ahoy!' roared Sir Edward Berry as the Royal Boat came up.

Seven hundred seamen in their best rig – long, quartered shoes, check-shirts, blue jackets, white trousers, with their stiff queues hanging down their backs – sprang to their stations. The boat drew alongside and the guns puffed out their salute.

'Away aloft!'

The yards were manned as the Queen, with Nelson, came up the side and all the officers uncovered. There had been an engagement they told him (he was a trifle grim) and his ship (but in his absence) had captured the famous *Guillaume Tell* . . .

The Queen insisted on visiting the sick bay. They

brought her to a young midshipman who lay there, his wounds green with gangrene. Impulsively she gave him an orange and prattled of his recovery; but the boy's eyes glazed and he stiffened even as she watched. Amid complete silence the Royal Party left the ship. The Queen was sobbing hysterically.

A few weeks brought the inevitable consequence. This last disobedience was too obvious to be passed over and Spencer wrote stiffly from London – 'It is by no means my wish or intention to call you away from service, but having observed that you have been under the necessity of quitting your station off Malta on account of your health, it appears to me much more advisable for you to come home at once than to be obliged to remain inactive at Palermo while active service is going on in other parts of the station.'

And other matters were now disturbing the minds of the Lords Commissioners. Captain Foote (who had commanded the *Seahorse* at Naples and signed the capitulation that Nelson set aside) had got back to London and, although several 'respectable friends' persuaded him that 'by urging a public investigation I should act injuriously to my country,' found 'the transactions in the Bay of Naples had become a common topic of conversation' and he could not remain silent.

The Peace Party made much of the matter and they had many friends. 'I am miserable at the

accounts I have read of the cruelties at Naples, but worst of all that my dear delightful Nelson annulled a signed Treaty upon the faith of which his enemies resigned their army,' wrote Lady Bessborough.

Burly Charles James Fox himself, resplendent in broad buff waistcoat, was heard thundering about it all across the floor of the House.

'Right honourable Gentleman . . . speaks of successes of the last campaign . . . does not mention the horrors . . . Naples . . . stained and polluted by murders so ferocious, cruelties so abhorrent, that the heart shudders at the recital . . .' Red-faced squires came panting and blowing into the Chamber (word was round that Fox was 'up') and sat ill at ease on the Tory benches. The great demagogue well into the swing of his periods rolled on: 'British officer brought forward . . . miserable victims savagely murdered . . . made terms under the sanction of a British name . . . should be conveyed to Toulon . . . thrown into dungeons . . . absolutely executed . . .'

A wave of revulsion spread through London's drawing rooms. Nelson's treachery was condemned at Brooks', argued at the Cocoa-Tree, denounced in every conventicle.

From Palermo came the splutter of a protest. Fox had 'used language unbecoming to the wisdom of a senator or the politeness of a gentleman or an Englishman. His Majesty's officers would always

act with honour and openness in all their transactions . . . The rebels came out of the Castle as they ought and as I hope all those who are false to their King and country will – *to be hanged*,' Nelson wrote. Mr. Alexander Davison was exhorted to 'put this in the papers.'

But the tide of popular disapproval was rising. The Admiralty sent orders to Keith that Nelson was to be permitted to take his passage in the first ship home. Spencer wrote a strong private letter at the same time.

Keith had no frigate to spare for the purpose; and so Nelson and the Hamiltons decided to join the Queen of Naples in her visit to Vienna and proceed on their way overland.

CHAPTER XI

THE SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY

1800. *April – October*

'Journies end in lovers meeting,
Every wise man's son doth know.'
Wm. Shakespeare.

On a morning late in April, 1800 – it was St. George's Day – Nelson convoyed the Queen of Naples and the Hamiltons out of Palermo. The Queen wanted to visit Vienna and Nelson and the Hamiltons wished to get back to England. The immediate goal was Leghorn for all of them. With that complete disregard for everything outside his own special convenience that had characterised his behaviour since the Battle of the Nile, Nelson brazenly took two line of battleships from the squadron blockading Malta to accommodate his friends.

They travelled in state. 'In the great cabin were many new publications – sent from England by Lady Nelson; a carving in wood of an immense

three-coloured plume of feathers taken from the *Guillaume Tell*, a stand of arms from the *St. Josef*, and the flagstaff of the *Orient*, while, in the corner, there stood on end the famous gift coffin which always depressed poor Emma.' To console her when the sight of it made her particularly doleful, they would sing:

'Come, cheer up, fair Delia, forget all thy grief,
For thy shipmates are brave and a hero's their chief;
How many in Albion each sorrow would check,
Could they kiss but one plank of this conquering deck.'

But fair Delia had a more vital worry which concerned Life and not Death. Mrs. Cadogan may have been in the secret; Nelson certainly was – Venus had taken her tribute for those long nights beneath the Sicilian moon.

On June 14th they anchored in Leghorn Roads – to learn that Bonaparte was descending once more on Italy. The terrified Queen would have returned to Palermo at once; but Lord Keith was at Genoa and had heard how Nelson had 'borrowed' two of his ships. It was too much even for Keith's monumental patience. He wrote at once ordering Nelson to release 'all the ships at Leghorn' and Nelson grudgingly sent them with the exception of his own. 'I have to request that she may take us to Gibraltar,' he asked.

The Commander-in-Chief would have none of it. 'It is not a matter of caprice but of actual duty and necessity which has obliged me to send the order which I must desire to be final.' A week later he followed the letter in person to Leghorn.

He found a queer medley. Sir William Hamilton, with no work to do, was rapidly sinking into senility. Emma was raucous and insistent; the Queen tearful and hysterical; Nelson so wrapped up in his mutual admiration society as to 'have lost all zeal for the public service.' Moreover, a courier from the Army had just brought in bad news.

Bonaparte by crossing the Alps had taken his enemy in the rear and Austria had suffered her greatest military defeat. The old order was reeling broken from the field of Marengo, and patriotic Englishmen denounced as unsporting and unfair the march across the Alps that enabled the dirty Frenchman to take his opponent in the rear. Bonaparte was only a day's march from Leghorn.

The Queen and Emma besought Keith on their knees in tears for the British battleship to take them back to Palermo. But to Keith's thinking 'Lady Hamilton had had command of the Fleet long enough'; and while Nelson was in his Circe's arms the whole Mediterranean command became farcical.

Keith sardonically told the Queen, who 'had a sort of convulsive fit,' that she could either go on to Vienna as quickly as possible or else return to her

dominions in one of her own Neapolitan frigates (there were several at Leghorn), which she was so unwilling to trust; and thereupon sailed away with his retrieved line of battleship.

At last, in the sweltering heat of the Tuscan summer, Nelson, the two women and old Sir William, rumbled off for Florence. It was the fifteenth of July.

They travelled very painfully, Sir William continually vowing that he would die by the way. They were twenty-six hours in reaching Florence and had to leave again in a hurry because the French were coming. On they jolted, past the small hill towns and clumps of cypresses, sleeping at wretched *osterie* among flea-infested sheets. The clumsy wheel of their coach broke and overturned them and for three days they hung about Arezzo waiting for it to be mended in a perpetual state of suspense as the French came nearer and nearer.

Then on again. They fell in with some Austrian officers, who told them that the French light cavalry were not two miles away. Now they no longer dared to stop to sleep anywhere but hurried on night and day. At last the sight of desolate fields and tumbled-down hovels with paper casements told them that they had crossed the boundary of the States of the Holy Catholic Church, where 'everybody is either a priest or a brigand or a beggar or a spy.' Peasants, running to their hovel doors, and citizens huddled in great decaying towns

watched the curious procession pass: the pale-faced little Admiral, greatest of living seamen; his big, buxom mistress; her doddering cuckold of a husband; and a Queen to chaperone it all.

At the close of a hot July they reached Ancona, where an Austrian frigate was ready fitted up with silk hangings, carpets and beds for the daughter of Maria Theresa. Unfortunately, the crew had tendencies towards Jacobinism and the Queen preferred to sail under the Russian flag.

Nelson on board the Czar's wretched vessel talked often with longing of his old ship. They were supremely uncomfortable. The Captain was confined to his bed with sea-sickness and his first-lieutenant was a Neapolitan adventurer, 'the most ignorant and insolent of beings.' A gale would have sunk the lot of them; but the sea kept calm, and on August 2nd they were safely at Trieste.

The port had eagerly waited for their coming; Nelson could not go out without a crowd of sight-seers at his heels. Whenever he set foot in the narrow way, where pigs and people jostled indiscriminately, there was an ovation with cries of *Viva Nelson*. At night there were illuminations. He was beginning to feel himself again. The royal party took the road to Vienna.

Over the Slavonian mountains they rattled, past fabulous forests, along tracks rutted with dried winter mud. For three weeks they rocked by the barred and bolted cabins where

'. . . the rude Carinthian boor
Against the wandering stranger bars the door,'

investing those remote mountain regions with a passing flash of romance and the glitter of courts and uniforms, until, on August 22nd, they rolled heavily past the earthworks, across the glacis, and through the gates of the Imperial Capital.

Vienna was war-weary and defeatist. A prophetic observer was already predicting that 'some day or other this country will be split up like Poland' and Nelson came like an Olympian champion to distracted Troy. Everywhere he was worshipped and applauded. 'The door of his house is always crowded with people,' wrote Lady Minto whom he had known in Corsica as Lady Elliot, 'and even the street when his carriage is at the door.' Common folk brought their children to touch him as if he were invested with the Divine Grace. 'One he took up in his arms and when he gave it back to the mother she cried for joy and said it would be lucky through life.' His picture swung among the many-coloured devices that hung above the shops in the narrow, winding streets, and at the sign of the fair Viennese, the famous waxen doll that set the daily fashions was decked in a 'Nelson' creation.

More sophisticated society welcomed him with that charming grace with which decadence has so long vested the gilded old city. Mozart had but lately gone, but Haydn was with them still, and the

baroque elegance of the Holy Roman Empire was gently fading to the flutings of a minuet. He showed himself in a box at the Opera; and the whole parterre rose to its feet and cheered. Prince Esterhazy gave a banquet for him where a hundred heyducks and hussars waited on the guests and where his health was drunk to a fanfare of trumpets and the discharge of cannon. Haydn visited him and accompanied Emma on the spinet while she sang:

'Britannia's leader gives the dread command,
Obedient to his summons flames arise;
The solid pyramids confess the shock,
And their firm bases to the centre rock.'

And withal his own countrymen found him slightly ridiculous. 'He has the same shock head and the same honest simple manners,' wrote Lady Minto, 'but he is devoted to Emma, he thinks her quite an *angel* and she leads him about like a keeper with a bear.'

She sat by him at meals to cut his meat and he carried her pocket-handkerchief. He was become absurdly vain too in his attire and they could not help laughing at the 'ribands, orders and stars' that he wore whenever he went out. He had even taken to mounting the Sultan's aigrette in his cocked hat and they thought it 'very ugly and not valuable.'

Emma's coarseness contrasted ill with Viennese elegance and the English were keenly sensitive to

the fact. 'It is really disgusting to see her with him,' wrote Lord Fitzharris, 'she is without exception the most coarse, ill-mannered woman I ever met with.'

Her very plebeian capabilities irritated them. When a Viennese lady gave a musical party with Haydn for guest of honour, Emma, instead of attending, sat down to Faro, played Nelson's cards and 'won between £300 and £400.' 'I could not disguise my feelings and joined in the general abuse of her,' writes a fellow guest.

And amid all this festivity Nelson's awkward conscience was persistently reminding him that the space between himself and reality was daily growing shorter. At the other end of the journey Fanny was waiting.

'I could say much but it would only distress me and be useless,' he had written with his mind dwelling upon the inevitable tragedy that he felt approaching. And again, with a hopeless attempt at postponing the crisis if only for a few hours, he added – 'I would not have you come to Portsmouth on any account.' Now, with the *hochs* of the populace still ringing in his ears and the precise harmonies of Vienna throbbing in his brain, he again tried to find a way, if not to put things back, at least to put them off. 'I have wrote to Davison to take a house, for the very short time I shall be in London' he laboriously spelt out in his cramped left-handed scrawl, 'to which I shall instantly

proceed and hope to meet you in the house.' Then he added out of his very heart-weariness – 'You must expect to find me a worn out old man.'

Two days later, his coach rumbled heavily over the wooden bridge at Nussdorf on its way north to Prague.

They got there for his birthday (the Queen had remained at Vienna) and the Hotel was all lit up with candles in his honour. 'On the subject of the charge for candles,' writes the industrious Mr. Baedeker, 'two opinions cannot exist, the cost of lights should be included in the charge for apartments.' This was not the opinion of Nelson's host who, much to the disgust of his illustrious guest, reckoned all the candles that he had lighted in his honour as special items on his bill.

The coach dumped them all in a very bad temper by the side of the Elbe at Lovositz, and they went on by water between the steep crags of the Erzgebirge to Dresden.

Mr. Elliot, the British Minister, invited them to a dinner at his 'pretty villa where his beautiful children were running about the garden like so many cupids and psyches.' After dinner there were songs in honour of Nelson, sung by Emma. The songs all ended in the sailor's way with Hip! Hip! Hurrah! and a bumper with the last drop on the nail. 'Lord Nelson was a perfect constellation of stars and orders.'

Society in the Saxon Capital treated the travellers

rather cruelly. The English in private talked of 'Anthony and Moll Cleopatra' and a Mrs. St. George understood that 'there will be no Court while they stay.' Nelson, who had given a party to see himself dressed up for that function, received the news in a fury. 'Sir, if there is any nonsense of that sort, Lady Hamilton will knock the Elector down,' he roared, 'and damme I'll knock him down too.'

The British Minister tactfully tried to soothe Emma by telling her that the Court would not amuse her because the Elector never gave dinners or suppers. The ruse was successful. 'What, no guttling?' she exclaimed incredulously and turned to other things.

She gave her famous 'attitudes,' that had so impressed Goethe at Naples, using 'a chair, some antique vases, a wreath of roses, a tambourine, and a few children' to say nothing of the 'several Indian shawls' that Nelson had purchased regardless of expense at Constantinople.

The effusion of champagne was not stopped until both Nelson and Emma were pretty far gone. 'Mrs. Siddons be damned,' roared the Admiral as he gloated over a favourite posture. And even poor old Sir William gave a turn on his own account before the sniggering audience, 'hopping round the room on his back bone, his arms, legs, star and ribbon all flying in the air.'

It was pathetic to see the three battered travellers

making this most tragic and grotesque of sentimental journeys: Nelson, 'a little man without any dignity,' seeking to drown his agony of suspense in anyone's champagne; Sir William, no more important now than the leather trunks or the travelling carriage; and Emma rapidly reverting to type. 'Her waist absolutely between her shoulders, her hair . . . never clean, her usual dress . . . tasteless, vulgar, loaded and unbecoming' and she herself 'stamped with the manners of her first situation much more strongly than one would suppose.' The Minister shook his head over her and prophesied that she would captivate the Prince of Wales, 'whose mind is as vulgar as her own,' and play a great part in England.

Within a week Dresden decided that they were quite impossible and Elliot ventured formally to announce to them that a frigate was waiting at Hamburg (which was untrue). The sorry troupe repacked and went down to the landing stage. The moment they went on board, Emma's maid began to scold in French about some provisions that had been forgotten 'in language quite impossible to repeat.' Emma began 'bawling for an Irish stew and her old mother set about washing the potatoes which she did as cleverly as possible. They were exactly like Hogarth's actresses dressing in a barn.'

At Magdeburg the landlord of the *gast-haus*, where they spent the night, made them into a peep-show and allowed round-eyed burghers to climb a

ladder and peep in at their window for a few groschen.

The leaves were dotting the Alster when they at last reached the Free City of Hamburg. There was no frigate and they had to wait ten days for the next mail packet. The Free City was kinder than the Electrical Capital and the old simple hero worship began again. They planned Bonaparte's overthrow with Dumouiriez who had saved the French Revolution at Valmy, but had since transferred his sword to the service of his exiled King; and they chatted to the lyric poet Klopstock who was chiefly engaged in writing odes 'too metaphysical to be easily understood.' At the poet's lodgings they were surprised by an aged Lutheran Pastor who had travelled forty miles to ask 'the saviour of the Christian world' to write his name on the flyleaf of a parish Bible. The Spirit of Laughter may well have smiled.

On the last day of October they embarked, and, after a passage that was appropriately stormy landed at Yarmouth on November 6th. It had cost the three of them £1094 to come from Palermo. Sir William and Nelson were to share the cost, but Nelson advanced it all. The dread meeting with Fanny was now close upon them and Emma's child was obviously coming soon.

CHAPTER XII

DEAREST EMMA

October 1800 – *March* 1801

'Shake hands for ever, cancel all our vows,
And when we meet at any time again
Be it not seen in either of our brows
That we one jot of former love retain.'
Michael Drayton.

A CARRIAGE stood waiting among the crowd on the shingle at Yarmouth. The travellers in their bulky wraps were pulled ashore; and after nearly three years Nelson once more trod English ground. As soon as they were settled among the cushions a score of lusty fellows hitched themselves to the shafts and dragged their hero amid the loud huzzas of the populace to the 'Wrestlers Inn' in the Square where the Mayor and Corporation were waiting with the Freedom of Yarmouth. Nelson appeared on the balcony in full uniform to address the crowd, Emma hanging on his arm. She wore a white muslin dress, its flounce embroidered in gold thread with anchors, leaves and medallions bearing the legend 'Nelson and Bronte.'

After all the speeches, and volleys, and playing of brass bands, the hero had a request to make. He would, if he might, go to the Parish Church to offer up thanks to God for his safe return. And so to church they all went – Mayor and Councillors, ship's officers, onlookers, Sir William, Nelson and Emma. The organ struck up 'See the Conquering Hero Comes' in a breathless burst of wind as Nelson came up the aisle with his mistress on his arm; and, with all Yarmouth at his side he rendered up his prayers.

That night, while the sky was bright with bonfires, he sat down and wrote to Fanny: 'We are at this moment arrived. Shall set off to-morrow noon and be with you Saturday to dinner. Sir William and Lady Hamilton beg their best regards and will accept your offer of a bed.'

In the morning, after ordering £50 to be given to the Mayor for distribution in the town, with 'five guineas for the town clerk,' and 'one guinea for the officer,' he set off for London and Fanny. A troop of light horse volunteers lumbered alongside his carriage in their tight uniforms 'as far as the county boundary.'

Like a true conquering hero he was dragged triumphantly into Ipswich and out of Ipswich, and all along the London road cottagers and bagmen doffed hats and waved kerchieves. So at last he came to London.

On the site of the present St. James's Theatre

there stood a typical dull, brick, eighteenth century inn – Nerots Hotel. Here, in the stuffy public parlour Fanny and the old Rector sat waiting. Fanny was forty-two. She was no fine lady; but a quiet domesticated little woman, simple, good natured and altogether unimaginative. She was already middle-aged and well aware of it. It had always been the queerly lovable little captain of the *Boreas* and not the Peer of Parliament with all his honours and fine friends that she had really adored. For all these years she had been patiently waiting for the time that she could have him for herself down at Roundwood where they could again lead the old Burnham life no longer worried by the cares of money and the ambition of his restless mind.

Now she knew most of the truth. She knew that he had come back to her in name; but that his affection had been mortgaged to Emma. They sat there wondering, she and the Rector, whether he would now meet the world as her husband, or whether he would continue to flout Society with Emma on his arm.

There was a bustle all down King Street when his carriage drew up at the door. He came into the hotel parlour carrying 'a lace trimming' which he had brought for her in Hamburg. His father received him with tremulous emotion. Then he introduced 'his dear friends' Sir William and Lady Hamilton.

That night the five of them dined together at Nerots Hotel. . . .

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Next day was Sunday and the news of that Saturday afternoon's meeting was the gossip of the fashionable world. It was said that Nelson's relationship with Emma was going on as it had done at Palermo; and there were whispers about Lady Hamilton's interesting condition. Reports of the sentimental journey had come through to London from many European cities and his popularity had sensibly waned since the Neapolitan scandals. And even if 'his violation of good faith and justice at Naples' might, as Lord Holland believed, be palliated by the ascendency that an 'artful and worthless woman' had obtained over a mind ignorant of the world, all agreed that Society should ignore both him and his paramour.

'Most of my friends,' wrote one who had borne Nelson company through Europe, 'were very urgent with me to drop the acquaintance. Things became very unpleasant.'

Even old comrades played him false. Troubridge warned his friends that it was inadvisable to see too much of any of the Nelson-Hamilton coterie. And St. Vincent wrote: – 'It is evident from Lord Nelson's letter that he is doubtful of the propriety of his conduct. I have no doubt he is pledged to getting Lady Hamilton received at St. James's

and everywhere and that he will get into much *bouillerie* about it.'

Meanwhile, ceremonies had to be observed and Nelson's popularity with the common people was as great as ever. On the Monday he was a guest at Guildhall. Once more, men instead of horses dragged his carriage. And once more he spoke from under a triumphal arch to an enthusiastic crowd while they handed him the sword that the Corporation had voted him after the Battle of the Nile. The handle was of gold, covered with blue enamel, studded with diamonds, the guard a crocodile supported by anchors. Nelson told the cheering Londoners that with it he hoped 'soon to aid in reducing our implacable and inveterate enemy to proper and due limits.'

But his own enemy was also implacable and inveterate, and refused, alas, to be reduced within any limits at all. At the Admiralty Lady Spencer, so effusive after the Nile, was decidedly cold; and the polite world looked on grimly when Fanny collapsed in a box at the theatre. Only one door – the door of the house in Grosvenor Square where the Hamiltons were staying with Beckford – was always open to him.

On November 28th there was more empty ceremony when he entered the House of Lords in full robes and was led to his 'due place next below to Lord Seaforth.' A life's ambition was fulfilled, but the sullen disapproval of the world

seemed heavier than ever. 'This place of London but ill suits my disposition,' he wrote sadly.

The King had always been friendly in the old days and Nelson presented himself at Court full of hope. His reception was 'singularly cold and repulsive.' The old King asked casually if he had recovered his health and then, without waiting for an answer, ostentatiously turned and spoke for half an hour to an unsuccessful general. 'Not very flattering after having been the adoration of Naples,' commented Collingwood. That night, at dinner with the Hamiltons, Nelson showed how deeply he had felt the Royal insult: 'The King spoke to Sir James for twenty minutes together, but to me for not *two*,' he said bitterly. During the dinner, he uttered 'many bitter complaints which Lady Hamilton vainly attempted to check, of the way he had been treated at Court that forenoon. The Queen had not condescended to take the slightest notice of him.'

How keenly Nelson felt such things only Emma really knew. 'My dear Lady Hamilton,' he wrote from Greenwich where he was attending Locker's funeral, 'I regret that I am not the person to be attended *upon* at this funeral, for although I have had my days of glory yet I find this world so full of jealousies and envy that I see but a very faint gleam of future comfort. I shall come to Grosvenor Square on my return from this melancholy procession and hope to find in the smiles of my friends some

alleviation for the cold looks and cruel words of my enemies. May God bless you my dear Lady and believe me your ever-unalterable Nelson.'

London had become intolerable. 'I would sooner,' he said, 'stay abroad for ever.'

The disapproval of his equals drove him further along the very course that had occasioned it. The more London cold-shouldered him the more he turned for comfort to Emma – and the more he slighted Fanny. Just before Christmas Beckford invited him and the Hamiltons down to his country house, Fonthill in Wiltshire. Fanny was not included in the invitation, but Nelson accepted.

It was the sentimental journey over again. Captain Wyndham, M.P., met them outside Salisbury with a troop of the Wiltshire Yeomanry and escorted the party to the Council House where Nelson received the Freedom of that City in 'an oak box with a silver plate' and suitably recognised in the crowd a sailor who had fought at the Battle of the Nile.

They left Salisbury after distributing £20 to the poor and arrived on December 20th at Fonthill where they were received by the Corps of Volunteers 'with their band of music playing Rule Britannia.' After 'a dinner of the most splendid character,' Emma 'together with other eminent vocal and instrumental performers' executed some fine pieces of music with 'great charms of voice and Italian sensibility.'

A few days later she gave one of those famous attitudes that had in their time captivated Goethe and moved the British Minister at Dresden to prophecy that they would one day captivate the Prince of Wales. She was Agrippina. 'The action of her head, her hands and arms in the various positions of the part was most classically graceful. . . . Her action was most perfectly just and natural as to draw tears from several of the company.' The observer remarks that 'in the last scene of this beautiful piece of pantomime she appeared with a young lady who was to personate a daughter.'

Yet despite this Christmas jollity Nelson could not conceal his anxiety which grew every day when he saw in Emma's person the approach of the inevitable. His host was struck by his extremely nervous state. When riding in a phaeton Nelson suddenly cried out 'this is too much for me; you must set me down.' In spite of assurances that the horses were 'perfectly under command,' he insisted on descending and walked home. St. Vincent saw him and remarked that he 'was very low. . . . He appeared and acted as if he had done me an injury and felt apprehensive that I was acquainted with it. Poor man. He is devoured with vanity, weakness and folly. He was strung with ribbons, medals, etc., and yet pretended that he wished to avoid the honour and ceremonies he everywhere met with upon the road.'

* * * * *

The Society that cold-shouldered Nelson still demanded his service. On New Year's Day 1801 he was appointed Vice-Admiral of the Blue and his flag was hoisted on the *St. Josef*, the same ship in whose capture at the Battle of St. Vincent he had borne so problematical a share. He left Fonthill, much worried, and went back to Fanny at Arlington Street. There he lingered for thirteen endless days, conscious that Society still treated him as an outcast and that at any moment Emma might give birth to his child.

There were other worries. One evening, as he was dressing for dinner, his servant Tom Allen announced that a lady was at the door urgently wishing to see him. Nelson hurried down and found waiting for him the 'sister of a Genoa merchant.' 'She appeared to be very near her confinement' and was 'much agitated.' Nelson sent Allen for a hackney coach, in which he drove away with her. He impressed upon Allen that he must say nothing about the visitor and it was two hours before he came back again.

And in those thirteen unlucky days Fanny's patience at last gave way. They were sitting at the breakfast table and Nelson made a passing reference to 'dear Lady Hamilton.' He had said as much a thousand times in the last few days; but this time something snapped in Fanny's mind. 'I am sick of hearing of dear Lady Hamilton,' she blazed, springing to her feet; 'you must give up her or me.'

'Take care, Fanny, what you say,' said Nelson in the voice that had sent Caracciolo to his death. 'I love you sincerely, but I cannot forget my obligations to Lady Hamilton, nor speak of her otherwise than with affection and admiration.'

'Then my mind is made up;' and Fanny flung out of the room.

'I call God to witness there is nothing in you or your conduct that I wish otherwise,' he recorded; for even then he could not justly say less. But the end had come.

He left London that same day for Plymouth. At Southampton his conscience assailed him. Perhaps he still remembered those far off days on the *Boreas*. He wrote to her once more:

'My dear Fanny, we are arrived and heartily tired; and with kindest regards to my father and all the family, believe me your affectionate Nelson.'

Early in the morning he pushed on for Plymouth, the prey of still greater anxieties. 'Anxiety for friends left and various workings of my imagination' wrought upon him so much that he became heart-sick in sober fact. All the windows were obliged to be put down and his carriage was stopped and there he sat in his chaise, halted by the road; the perspiration soaking his clothes and yet he was 'dead with cold.'

Applauded and alone he journeyed westward through Honiton and Exeter and reached Plymouth on the 20th. It was pouring with rain and the town

was gloomy. His cabin was not yet ready and only contained two chairs which Emma had given him. A letter from her was waiting. She had lost her dog Nile which he had bought 'at a large dog shop in Holborn,' and had caught a serious cold while out looking for him.

He was dejected and kept indoors to the disappointment of local society. He gave great offence in not going to the Long Room, but he had firmly made up his mind to avoid every assembly.

His eye was nearly blind and he was in excruciating pain. Though he bathed it in 'cold water every hour,' sat down in a dark room and wore a green shade, the film so extended that he could only see from one corner.

The *San Josef* sailed round to Torbay, and he went by land to rejoin her. On the 25th there was news of Fanny from Emma. She had gone to Brighton to find the sun. But by now the voice of his evangelical conscience was stilled. 'Let her go to Brighton or where she pleases. I care not. She is a great fool and thank God you are not the least like her.'

What he did care passionately about was the matter of his forthcoming child. Before he left London he and Emma had arranged a very transparent fiction in case their letters should go astray. A mythical 'Mrs. Thompson,' in London with Emma, was to cover the latter's identity; and she was to correspond through Emma with a non-exist-

ant 'Mr. Thompson,' who was supposed to be perpetually in Nelson's company. For the first time now, Nelson thought it wise to use these pseudonyms.

'I delivered poor Mrs. Thompson's note – her friend is truly thankful for her kindness and your goodness. Poor man – he is very anxious and begs you will write a line just to comfort him. He appears to feel very much her situation. He is so agitated and will be so for two or three days.'

Emma, meanwhile, was playing her part in London. Sir William and she had moved into their new house 23 Piccadilly, and here she retired to her room on the pretext of an attack of indigestion. For several days she remained there indisposed, refusing to see any visitors.

Nelson was writing every day. On the 26th there was 'a gale of wind' and he sang in momentary elation 'Come cheer up fair Emma,' as she and he had sung it together between Palermo and Leghorn. 'Keep up your spirits, all will end well.'

His confidence was justified. On January 29th she was safely delivered of his child – a daughter. For a week she concealed it in the house, then smuggled it away in a muff to a foster-mother, Mrs. Gibson of 9 Little Tichfield Street, Marylebone. Nelson was told at once.

As soon as he heard the good news he wrote ecstatically from Torbay – 'I believe poor dear Mrs. Thompson's friend will go mad with joy. He cries,

prays and performs all tricks, yet dare not show all or any of his feelings, but he has only one to consult with. He swears he will drink your health this day in a bumper and damn me if I don't join him in spite of all the doctors in Europe.'

On February 3rd he wrote again to 'Mrs. Thompson' – 'Your good and dear friend does not think it proper at present to write with his own hand, but he hopes the time may not be far distant when he may be for ever united to his *only* love. He swears before Heaven he will marry you as soon as possible which he fervently prays may be soon. He charges me to say how dear you are to him and that you must, every opportunity, kiss and bless for him his dear little girl which he wishes to be called Emma out of gratitude to our dear good Lady Hamilton.'

His bare cabin, his aching eye, his wounded pride, were forgotten in the glory of his love. He wrote every day brimming over with that enthusiasm of his early years that life had done so much to cool.

'Your dear and excellent friend,' he wrote on the 5th to his 'Mrs. Thompson,' 'has desired me to say that it is not usual to christen children till they are a month or six weeks' old . . . It can be christened at St. George's, Hanover Square . . . Its name will be Horatia daughter of Ahem and Morata Etnorb. If you read the surname backwards and take the letters of the other name it will make very extraordinary the names of your real and affectionate

friends Lady Hamilton and myself . . . the child if you like it can be named by any clergyman without its going to church.' – 'You may rely I shall not open my mouth to poor Mrs. Thompson's business to any creature on this earth . . . it might be better to omit christening the child for the present, and even privately baptising it. The clergyman would naturally ask its parents' name which would put poor Mrs. Thompson in trouble and cause suspicion.'

'Poor Mrs. Thompson's business' was being carried on in a series of discreet notes passing through the post between Piccadilly and Little Tichfield Street – 'my cold has been so bad I could not go out to-day, but to-morrow will call on you. Write me by the penny post how the dear little Miss Horatia is. Ever your sincere friend E.H. 7 o'c. 7th February.'

'I hope my dear Mrs. Gibson that Miss Horatia is well. If it is a fine day to-morrow bring her in a coach well wrapped up to see me, but let her be well covered getting in and out of the coach. Come at 11 o'c. Your sincere friend E. Hamilton. 4 o'c. 11th February.'

And again a week later – 'At 11 o'c. to-morrow pray bring Miss Horatia to see your sincere friend. Come in the coach as the weather is bad. E.H. Her mamma is better.'

And Sir William? – Sir William found it wise to turn a blind eye to the stream of letters going out

and coaches coming to his door. He had come back after thirty years abroad a poor man with a mountain of debt. The shadow of the Caracciolo scandal hung over him, and his pension was precarious. He needed influence in high places. Just fifteen years before, Charles Greville, faced with a similar problem, had sold Emma to Sir William to pay his debts. Sir William had already used her the same way with Nelson at Palermo. Now, the Prince Regent could secure a pension; and the Prince Regent had a taste for women. The prophecy of the British Minister at Dresden was shrewd.

News of strange schemes came down to the tired and tense Nelson on the *St. Josef*. 'I own I wonder that Sir William should have a wish for the Prince of Wales to come under your roof,' he wrote. 'No good can come of it, but every harm. You are too beautiful not to have enemies and even one visit will stamp you as his *chère amie*. He is dotingly fond of such women as yourself and without one spark of honour.'

As the days went by, fear and jealousy haunted Nelson now that he was no longer near his Emma to watch over her – 'He will make every means to get into your house,' he warned her, 'I know his aim is to have you for a mistress. The thought so agitates me that I cannot write. I am in tears, I cannot bear it.'

On February 8th he feared 'that you will not be

so true to me as I am to you. I hope to be dead before that should happen. Forgive me Emma, oh forgive your dear disinterested Nelson.'

Emma was his sun, but lying convalescent in Piccadilly she sometimes found his letters tiresome, and his insinuations she hated; so she countered by taking him to task for his own actions down at Torbay. He had said something about stockings, and in 1801 a lady's stockings were not for ordinary eyes.

The hero of the Nile became almost hysterical under her attack. 'Well my dear friend I only wish you could read my heart, then I am sure you would not write or even think a hard thing of me. Suppose I did say the west country women wore black stockings, what is it more than if you was to say what puppies all the present young men are.'

He burnt her cruel letter and passed his evenings re-reading the rest – 'forty times over' – 'I have scratched out all the scolding words and if you were to see how much better and prettier they read I am sure you would never write another scolding word to me.' His protestations had their effect, for she wrote more kindly. He was happier and told her 'never again will I scold unless you begin, therefore pray never do.'

But the next day he had news that disposed altogether of his good intentions. 'We have been drawn in to be under the absolute necessity of giving a dinner to the Prince of Wales on Sunday

next,' wrote Sir William, 'he asked it himself . . . and she has at last acquiesced to my opinion.'

'Acquiesced' to his opinion! Nelson dreaded the worst and wrote post-haste – 'I am so agitated that I can write nothing. I knew it would be so and you can't help it. Why did you not tell Sir William? Your character will be gone. Do not have him *en famille*. Do not sit long at table. Good God! he will be next to you and telling you soft things . . . At dinner he will hob glasses with you . . . Oh God that I was dead! . . . I tremble and God knows how I write . . . I am gone almost mad . . . It will be in all the newspapers with hints. Recollect what the villain said to Mr. Nisbet *how you hit his fancy*. I am mad, almost blind, but ever for ever yours to the last moment, your only, your Nelson.'

The details suggested themselves to Nelson's fancy. 'He will put his foot near you . . . he wishes, I dare say, to have you alone . . . God strike him blind if he looks at you – this is high treason and you may get me hanged by revealing it. Oh God that I were.'

For forty-eight hours he thought of nothing else. On the 19th he was already asking for details about what happened on the 20th, for he reckoned that by the time his letter reached her it would have been all over. 'Will you sing for the fellow *The Prince unable to conceal his pain?* . . . May God blast him! Be firm! . . . Do not I beseech you, risk

being at home. Does Sir W. want you to be a whore to the rascal! . . . Did you sit alone with the villain for a moment? No, *I will not believe it!* Oh God, oh God! keep my senses.'

And before the letter had gone he had sent another to follow it, asking, for her and Sir William 'not to suffer the Prince to dine or even visit.' – 'Tis what no real modest person would suffer, and Sir W. ought to know that his views are *dishonourable*.'

The next day was the very day of the party. He went to bed in an agony of apprehension and was 'very unwell all night' with 'horrid dreams.'

And after all, the meeting never took place. Emma was still so unwell that the Hamiltons could not have His Royal Highness to dinner, 'which will not vex me' she said placidly.

On February 22nd the new Flagship *St. George*, to which Nelson had been transferred on the 12th, was ordered to Spithead to embark troops for an expedition to the Baltic. The move gave him an opportunity for a few days in London – a chance to see Emma and his child. His emotions were so strong that when Troubridge preceded him with the news of his going 'it rushed into my mind that in 10 hours he would see you. A flood of tears followed – it was too much for me to hear. I could not help telling him what would I not have given to have been in his pocket.'

He was careful, in these days, to avoid all female

society. The Commissioner, an acquaintance of near thirty years, was very pressing. 'His wife I am told likes a drop and looks like a cook-maid. But I will dine nowhere without your leave, although with my present feelings I might be trusted with fifty virgins naked in a dark room.'

Instead of paying civilities to the lady who looked like a cook-maid, he let his imagination run joyously on his forthcoming meeting. 'My poor dear Mrs. T., poor Thompson seems to have forgot all his . . . sorrows in the thought that he will soon bury them all in your dear, dear bosom. I daresay twins will again be the fruit of you and his meeting.'

At last, the long-wished moment came . . .

How he travelled 'almost all night' to reach her; how he called at Little Tichfield Street and 'played for hours with the infant on the floor calling her his own child' (just as he had played with another child so long ago under a table at Nevis); how he was induced to attend a rout when he wanted to spend the evening with his love; and how Emma at the end of three breathless days found her heart 'fit to burst quite with grief,' is recorded in fragmentary notes and memoirs.

Fanny also longed to come up to London to say good-bye, but Nelson did not encourage her. So between her sadness and her shyness she lingered on at Brighton to hold her self-respect and Emma wrote delightedly of how 'Tom Tit' had been

discomforted. 'Tom Tit does not come to town. She was offered and was refused'; and Emma highly approved the refusal since 'she only wanted to do mischief to all the great Jove's relations.' Nor did Nelson find the time to go to Brighton. 'He knows better than that,' said Emma. 'They are a vile set, Tom Tit and Cub' (Josiah Nesbitt) 'hated by everybody.'

At Piccadilly all went smoothly – and the world called them '*Tria juncta in uno*,' 'For Sir William, he and I have but one heart in three bodies,' Emma said.

The three days ended on February 27th and he spent the next day getting back to his ship. He was slightly disappointed (perhaps his lonely imagination had over-shadowed reality); and he was sorry to have found Emma 'a little unwell as it deprived him of much pleasure.' 'But,' he added, 'he is determined to have full scope when he next sees her.' He thought too that they had not made the most of the 'short time they were together;' he was sure 'neither of us should have gone to Lady D's rout, we could amuse ourselves better at home,' and he was disgusted at some of the people he had met. 'That Lady is a damned bitch – she would pimp for her husband that she might get at her lovers' – he wished 'to God I had dined alone with you. *What a dessert we would have had!*'

That same evening there came to the *St. George* a confidential servant with more farewells from

Emma, and Nelson used the occasion to tell her more passionately than he had ever yet done how much he really loved her.

'My own dear wife, for such you are in the eyes and in the face of Heaven. There is nothing in this world I would not do for us to live together and to have our own dear little child with us. I firmly believe this campaign will give us peace – then we will set off for Bronte . . . In twelve hours we shall be across the water and freed from all the nonsense of friends or rather pretended ones . . . Unless all matters accord it would bring 100 of tongues and slanderous reports if I separated from her (which I would do with pleasure the moment we can be united. I want to see her no more), therefore we must manage till we can quit this country or your uncle dies. I love you I never did love anyone else. I never had a dear pledge of love till you gave me one and you thank God never gave one to anybody else. My beloved Emma and my country are the two dearest objects of my fond heart – *a heart susceptible and true.* I burn all your dear letters and I wish you would burn mine. My longing for you both person and conversation you may readily imagine. What must be my sensations at the idea of sleeping with you! It sets me on fire – even the thoughts much more would the reality. I am sure my love and desires are all to you and if any woman naked were to come to me even as I am at this moment from thinking of you I hope it might

rot off if I would touch her even with my hand. . .'

For three days he was becalmed amid a constant fall of snow and rain and he used the enforced inactivity to write to Fanny who was still uncomfortably in his mind. To her he was still the formal husband.

'I neither want or wish for anybody to care what becomes of me – whether I return or am left in the Baltic. Living I have done all in my power for you and if dead you will find I have done the same. Therefore my only wish is to be left to myself – wishing you every happiness.'

Rheumatic with the vile spring weather he grew ill-tempered and his ill-temper again made him faintly suspicious of Emma. 'I have noticed,' he wrote, 'it almost appeared to me you liked to dwell on the theme that fellow wished and what he would give to enjoy your person . . . My head! my head! Good night, I am more dead than alive.'

He was unhappy because now that Emma was 'growing better in health every day,' her husband was taking her out again and the news of her gaieties frightened him.

'What can Sir Wm. mean by wanting you to launch out into extravagance and he that used to think a little candle-light and iced water would ruin him . . . But you are at auction or rather to be sold by private contract. Good God, my blood boils . . . How different I feel! A cottage, a plain

joint of meat and happiness, doing good to the poor and setting an example of virtue and godliness worthy of imitation even to kings and princes.'

'The iniquity of wanting you to associate with a lot of bawds, whores and unprincipled liars, can this be the great Sir William Hamilton? I blush for him.'

HORATIO NELSON

PART THREE

LADY NELSON

CHAPTER I

THE FREEDOM OF THE SEAS

1801. *March – July*

'You brave heroic minds
Worthy your country's fame
That honour still pursue –
Go and subdue!'

Michael Drayton.

By 1801, the French War had lost its original character of a Monarchist Crusade and had deteriorated into an economic struggle between France, the elephant, trampling the old Europe under foot, and England, the whale, swallowing up everything that sailed the face of the waters. Wherever Bonaparte controlled a port, that port was closed to England; and England's answer was to declare that port blockaded. Furthermore, every ship on the high seas was subject to the right of search for contraband by English vessels and was liable to be declared a prize, even if it sailed under a neutral flag.

To England, this right of search was imperative for her existence as a great power; to Neutrals the

freedom of the seas was essential for the survival of the trade by which they existed. And the right of search was the negation of the freedom of the seas.

The clash of these contradictory doctrines leagued the Neutrals of Northern Europe in defence of the freedom of the seas during the European War that had arisen over American Independence in 1780; and when that crisis had passed Denmark continued to maintain that a belligerent's right of search violated the rights of nations.

At the end of 1799 a Danish frigate in charge of a convoy fired on English ships exercising the right of search. Frigate and convoy were impounded. In the summer of 1800, after acute friction between the two countries, the vessels were restored, and Denmark virtually admitted the right of search.

The concession infuriated the Czar, Paul I, who, in August of the same year called on Prussia, Denmark and Sweden to unite in an Armed Neutrality to enforce the freedom of the seas, and to resist the right of search. Denmark, in spite of her arrangement with England in the previous summer, adhered to this Armed Neutrality in December, 1800. 'The powers of the North may rightly count on France,' proclaimed Bonaparte; England's reply was to demand an explanation from Denmark, pending which a squadron was concentrated at Yarmouth. To join this force Nelson at last sailed from Spithead in the *St. George* on March 2nd, 1801.

His spirits rose at the prospect of active service. He delighted the men of the *St. George* by stepping down from the Olympian solitude of the Captain's cabin to mingle in the activities of the ship. He hauled at the fishing net himself; and insisted on taking the Master's place and giving sailing orders, though he was lamentably out of practice at setting sails and keeping course and his orders soon brought the *St. George* to a standstill. 'Well, now, see what we have done,' he said irritably to the Master, and as that worthy kept a tactful silence, added, 'Well, sir, what mean you to do now?'

'I don't exactly know, my Lord.'

'Well, I am sure if you do not know what to do with her, no more do I either,' replied Nelson and he strode away to his cabin.

On March 6th, the *St. George* entered Yarmouth Roads. Events were blowing up for a crisis. Denmark was proving obdurate and Paul I had seized all English ships in his harbours.

Talk of Nelson's new opportunity was in everyone's mouth. 'As I am informed you are going to destroy or bring away all the Swedes, Danes and Russians,' wrote one calling himself Tom Tugbear, 'I beg your honour's goodness to bring over Czar Paul and bestow him upon me as I am a poor fellow and wants an outlandish wild beast to carry about as a show, which I think will enable me to maintain a wife and six children.'

'Lord Nelson will do his best to comply with Mr.

Tugbear's request,' noted the Admiral in his own hand on the letter.

But the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty had other views. The miasma of Nelson's conduct at Naples and Palermo was still about him and they gave the command of the Baltic expedition to Vice-Admiral Sir Hyde Parker.

Sir Hyde was on shore when the *St. George* cast anchor and refused to see his second in command until eight next morning. Nelson was furious at the slight and the delay. In the morning he was up at daybreak as usual and breakfasted at six, but Sir Hyde would not see him before eight. When they met, they both were very formal and correct.

The squadron continued to hang about at Yarmouth and Nelson to fret at the delay. Sir Hyde, who was getting on in years, had just married a young wife and he wanted to give a ball for her on the 13th. But Nelson was in no mind to wait so long. As he put it, 'Time is our best ally, and I hope we will not give her up as all our allies have given us up . . . Our friend here is a little nervous about dark nights and fields of ice, but we must brace up, these are not times for nervous systems.'

Sir Hyde was still fumbling with his charts and isotherms and white kid gloves when an express written by St. Vincent from the Admiralty but inspired by Nelson directed him to 'proceed without a moment's loss of time into the Baltic.' The fleet of seventeen line of battle ships, eleven frigates, seven

bomb vessels, two fireboats, nine gun-brigs, two cutters, a schooner and two luggers sailed on March 12th. Six more line of battle ships joined them just after they had started.

A week later, they were all off the Skaw, whence a frigate was dispatched with an ultimatum to Copenhagen. While the envoy was pressing England's claims upon Prince Alexander of Denmark, the fleet sailed down as far as the nothern point of the Island of Zealand, upon which Copenhagen stands, and anchored off Elsinore. Meanwhile, the Prince was inspiring the defence of his capital and his people were toiling to provide a screen of block ships and strengthen the batteries guarding the city.

On the 23rd the envoy reappeared with a defiant rejection of England's terms and a tale of the mighty defences that were rising along the waterfront of the Danish capital. It was war.

Sir Hyde summoned a council of officers. Nelson was insistent on an immediate attack on Copenhagen. He argued that Denmark should be silenced at once, so as to free the fleet for an attack on Russia before the melting of the Baltic ice should enable Paul to marshal his navy. His energy carried the council. It now remained to draft the plan of attack. The envoy pointed out that the four miles of the city's defences were strongest at their northern or nearer point which consisted of the giant 'Three Crowns' battery and five ships of war. Nelson

thereupon contended that the attack must approach the city from the south so as to avoid the strong head of the enemy's line and secure a wind which would, if things went wrong, carry the English fleet on past Copenhagen and back into the open sea. Here also his vigour overbore his opponents and this plan was adopted.

The council broke up and the English fleet sailed into the Sound out of range of the guns of Castle Kronborg and out of range of the defences of Copenhagen to a point five miles below the city. The citizens clustered on roofs and towers to watch for the fleet. But when they saw it and heard no shot fired they were astonished and dismayed. 'We all reckoned, and according to the charts we could do nothing else, that they could never pass our whole line this way without exposing themselves to its concentrated fire; I could not understand why no shot was fired, nor realise it when people told me they were out of range,' declared Herr Niebuhr. Others saw more clearly that the attack was coming from the south, a quarter which they had never expected, and that Nelson had circumvented their strongest defence. But it had taken the English fleet a week to get down the Sound, a time the Prince had fully employed in perfecting the city defences.

In front of Copenhagen there is a large shoal called the Middle Ground which divides the channel into two arms. The English fleet had come

down the eastern arm of the channel and had anchored just to the south of the Middle Ground. From here Nelson and Sir Hyde sailed up the western arm or King's Channel on which Copenhagen stands in the schooner to examine the Danish system of defence.

As the envoy had truly said, it stretched for four miles down the coast from the 'Three Crowns Battery' and its five attendant warships at the northern end. There were seven old warships, hulks, cut down to the level of their lower gun decks only two of which were rigged at all. Interspersed between these hulks were the floating batteries, eleven altogether. The eighteen craft mounted 634 guns.

The schooner completed her reconnaissance before dark and under cover of the night the English masters and pilots sounded the King's Channel and buoyed it. Next afternoon, the 31st, Sir Hyde called his final council.

Nelson was strung up to a tense pitch of emotion. Working the stump of his missing arm he paced up and down the cabin, mortified at everything that savoured of alarm or irresolution. He volunteered to lead the attack and Sir Hyde agreed. He asked for ten battleships and all the smaller craft and Sir Hyde 'with sound discretion and in a handsome manner' gave him two more than he demanded. The Commander-in-Chief himself was to return up the eastern channel with the balance of the ships

and create a diversion against the 'Three Crowns' battery from the north.

Next day Nelson crowded his squadron up the end of the King's Channel to within two miles of the southern end of the Danish line and anchored there. That night Captain Hardy rowed out to the nearest of the enemy's ships and took soundings. The whereabouts of the shallows was still a matter of conjecture and the width of the available channel between the Danish line and the edge of the Middle Ground was a vital matter for the attacking ships. Nelson had shifted his flag to the *Elephant* and that night he gave a large party in his cabin.

He was extremely cheerful and gave the toast 'a leading wind and success to-morrow.' At half-past nine the party broke up and he retired to the after-cabin with his ship's captain Foley (the same who had led the inner line at the Nile) and Captain Riou who commanded the frigates and light craft. Under the eyes of Emma's likeness, as an admirer had depicted her crowning the Rostral column at Naples, the three of them then set to work to draw the detailed Order of Battle for the morrow. Nelson was exhausted; he had been up for three days and nights, and at the pressing instance of his companions his cot was brought into the cabin and as he lay in it he began to hammer out the wording of his instructions.

'As Vice-Admiral Lord Nelson cannot with precision mark the situation . . . of the floating

batteries lying between their . . . hulks, the ships . . . to be opposed to the floating batteries will find stations by observing the stations of ships opposed to the hulks . . .' He went on to assign to each of his ships a definite objective and so composed his instructions in detail to their final paragraph. 'The *Aclmène*, *Blanche*, *Arrow*, *Dart* (frigates) . . . to proceed under Captain Riou of the *Amazon* to perform such services as he is directed by Lord Nelson.'

At eleven o'clock Hardy came in with news of the soundings. There was deep water right up to the enemy's line. Nelson went on with his dictation. At one in the morning he had at last finished and half-a-dozen clerks assembled in the great cabin to transcribe a copy of the Orders for each ship's captain.

All through the night their quills scratched and spluttered under the swinging lanterns as they wrote and wrote again. 'As-Vice-Admiral-Lord-Nelson-cannot-with-precision-mark-the-situation . . .' (the words came monotonously, almost by rote) '. . . such-service-as-he-is-directed-by-Lord-Nelson.' Every half hour as they sat huddled among the papers they heard his voice shouting from the after-cabin, recalling this, emending that, asking if the other was quite clear. And all the time they went on: 'As-Vice-Admiral-Lord-Nelson-cannot-. . .' till at last when the darkness thinned and the dull forms of the Danish hulks came slowly into focus and the sleepers in Copenhagen woke to

a grim and anxious morning, the last clerk completed for the last time the words '. . . such-service-as-he-is-directed-by-Lord-Nelson.'

At six, Nelson came in to the great cabin ready dressed having already breakfasted. He signalled for all captains to come aboard and gave each a copy of the Orders. The wind was fair from the south.

At half-past nine the signal flew – 'prepare to weigh.' Slowly and majestically the fleet moved off. The leading ships drifted safely to their stations but number five in the line was unable to leave her anchorage and number six behind her ran upon the Middle Ground. After this the other ships came safely into deep water, except number eleven which ran upon the Middle Ground. So that when the battle began shortly after ten o'clock Nelson had nine effective line of battle ships.

But the fair south wind that blew his division up the King's Channel held Sir Hyde off at the other end, and the 'Three Crowns' battery and the Danish squadron at the north of the line were engaged by Captain Riou in default of any diversion from that quarter.

At eleven the action was general and Herr Niebuhr, the Classicist, busy stowing away manuscripts in his house at Copenhagen, was startled by 'a very violent cannonade.' The day was cloudy and in the dull northern light the Danes stood to their guns like men.

'Everywhere a lighted brand
In a bold determined hand;
And the Prince of all the land
Led them on.'

Nelson paced the *Elephant's* quarter-deck 'at times much animated.' A shot crashed into the mainmast and its fearful splinters fell in a shower all around him. 'Warm work,' he said with a smile, 'this day may be the last to any of us at a moment.' And then, as he came to the gangway, he stopped short and said decisively, 'Mark you, I would not be elsewhere for thousands.'

All through that close forenoon the discharge of the cannon merged into a perpetual roar. The Danish hulks crumbled before the steady broadsides of Nelson's ships and the floating batteries flamed and split. Yet the defenders, with that perverse habit that makes brave men die rather than surrender their country, continued to fire shot for shot. To the north Riou's light squadron with great dash and no perceptible effect was standing under the guns of the 'Three Crowns' battery and pouring its broadsides against the stone defences. But masts and spars were crashing and men were falling fast. At one o'clock in the afternoon there was still no sign of victory, and the English ships torn and battered must still run the gauntlet of the 'Three Crowns' battery before they could get again to the sea. From his quarter-deck, Sir Hyde sick-

ened by the slaughter signalled 'Discontinue the engagement,' and Riou ordered his shattered frigates to comply.

A lieutenant reported Sir Hyde's signal to Nelson aboard the *Elephant*; he ignored him and continued to pace the deck. The officer waited deferentially. The Admiral's promenade again brought them face to face and the lieutenant asked whether he should repeat the signal.

'No, acknowledge it!'

The signal's officer turned towards the poop and Nelson shouted after him 'Is number sixteen ('for close action') still hoisted?'

'Aye, aye, sir.'

'Then mind you keep it so!'

The air was black and oppressive with smoke, the decks were strewn with splintered wood and mangled flesh and jagged iron. Nelson looked through it and beyond it. He strode down his quarter-deck, sawing the air with the stump of his wounded arm and repeating 'Number 39, number 39 (discontinue action). Do you know what's hoisted on board the commander-in-chief – number 39 – leave off action. Now damme if I do,' and he turned to Captain Foley. 'You know I have only one eye – I have a right to be blind sometimes.' He put his telescope derisively to his blind eye – 'Really I do not see the signal,' he laughed.

Fighting desperately under the eye of their Prince, the Danes struggled on. Volunteers from

the city replaced the fallen gunners on the batteries and blockships. Hulks that had struck received new crews and fired on the English boats that came to take them; but their firing flagged as afternoon came on, and while the southern part of their line was beaten into silence, the English bomb ships began to fire over the fleet into the town. Herr Niebuhr heard the continuous roar give way to a succession of sullen thuds and ventured out into the streets. Grim silence enveloped the city.

An officer was telling somebody about a bomb that had burst at his feet; it was said that the barbarous enemy were firing with iron nails. He passed a group of people studying a notice posted by the chief of police about how to behave in a bombardment, learned at last ('I never was so shattered') that the southern blockships had been silenced. Yet the blockships spluttered on. On one of them where only eight survived they begged their commander to let them man their one remaining gun. 'Nelson is on that ship,' they cried, 'let him remember the time he fought us.'

Nelson was desperate. He had flagrantly disobeyed orders in a gambler's fling for Victory and Renown. It was now half-past two. For an hour he had prolonged the carnage and exposed his ships on his own responsibility. Five of them were aground, three had hoisted distress signals (they said that two had struck); and his only way out lay past the grim 'Three Crowns' battery that had

already crippled Riou's frigates and was waiting to smash the battered English force when it should drift by. And if retreat should become necessary – and some said it was – the five ships aground would be irrevocably lost. None knew better than he that all the elements of a Court Martial were present.

He had battered a few hulks into submission and had smashed some floating batteries; but to press the uncompleted victory would spell eventual defeat. He was trapped.

But with superb address he grasped the key to the position. Could he bluff his enemy into breaking off the engagement at the price of the apparent defeat they had already suffered?

In his blue greatcoat, leaning on the rudderhead, he called for pen and ink and penned a vital mesage:

'To the brothers of Englishmen, the Danes,' he wrote; 'Lord Nelson has orders to spare Denmark when no longer resisting, but if the firing is continued Lord Nelson will be obliged to set on fire all the floating batteries he has taken, without having the power of saving the brave Danes who have defended them.'

The wording was exceedingly careful; the manner of dispatch even more so. He insisted on sealing the note with wax, although it cost a life to have it fetched. 'At first I was going to seal it with a wafer,' writes the Purser of the *Elephant*, 'but he would not allow this to be done, observing that it

must be sealed or the enemy would think it was written in a hurry.' A flag of truce was flown and the letter passed through the contending fleets to Prince Alexander who was 'near the sally port, animating his people in a spirited manner.'

In an agony of apprehension Nelson discussed the practicability of withdrawing; while the steady thunder of the 'Three Crowns' battery warned him of the danger that had to be faced should this last move miscarry. At last the reply came. The Danish General Lindholm came on board with a flag of truce and asked the precise purport of the message.

'Lord Nelson's object in sending on shore a flag of truce is humanity,' was the reply; 'he therefore consents that hostilities shall cease till Lord Nelson can take his prisoners out of the prizes and consents to land all the wounded Danes and to burn or remove his prizes.'

Once more there was an anxious wait while Lindholm took the new message to Alexander. Then, like the end of a firework display, the Danish guns began slowly to splutter out. The 'Three Crowns' battery relapsed into a sullen silence and their whole line lay quiet. From the *Elephant* the signal to discontinue the engagement fluttered amid the smoke and the weary English seamen at last paused at their guns.

The city streets were filled with waggons removing goods to a place of safety – for it was only a truce

so far. 'There was silence as of the grave, faces streaming with tears . . . the expression of the bleeding wounds of defeat.'

General Lindholm was referred to Sir Hyde's flagship to arrange the precise terms of an armistice and he was 'no sooner gone' than Nelson showed his real motive in requesting a truce. Such English ships as were still afloat, though much crippled, were sailed past the 'Three Crowns' battery into the open sea, and as soon as night fell boats were dispatched to bring off the five ships that were aground. Last, because least important, the 'prizes' were brought away as provided by the armistice.

At a cost of 943 officers and men killed and wounded, Nelson's squadron had taken two ships of the line (only one of which was worth retaining as a trophy) and four hulks, together with eight floating batteries. The English ships had been most severely damaged. The Danes had lost 1600 killed and wounded.

That same night, he wrote to Emma: 'My dearest Friend, That same Deity who has on many occassions protected Nelson has once more crowned his endeavours with complete success . . . May the heavens bless you. Ever your affectionate and attached friend Nelson and Bronte.' Tired as he was, 'having scarcely slept one moment from the 24th of last month,' he tried to express his passion in verse:

'From my best cable though I'm forced to part,
I leave my anchor in my angel's heart,
Love like a pilot shall the pledge defend,
And for a prong his happiest quiver lend.'

'*St. George*, April 2nd, 1801: 9 o'clock at night. Very tired after a hard fought battle.'

* * * * *

A week later, Denmark agreed to suspend hostilities, to allow the English Fleet a free passage through the Baltic and to secede from the Armed Neutrality. But the Armed Neutrality was already a thing of the past. On March 24th, Paul I, Czar of All the Russias, had fallen victim to a palace conspiracy and his son Alexander reigned in his stead.

But for three more months the English fleet steered a desultory course about the seas of Northern Europe. Sir Hyde received his recall early in May and Nelson became Commander-in-Chief. He was very ill; so ill that he told Davison he believed that 'if I do not see you in fourteen days probably I never may.'

His only solace was the thought of retiring from the world with Emma as soon as he should get home. 'I consider this as being at school,' he told her, 'and going to England as going home for the holidays.' But he did not mean to stay in England. He dreamt of peaceful days 'under a chestnut-tree at Bronte,' the paternal Lord of a happy people, the trusted adviser of a friendly King.

His own King he knew was not too friendly; his own people included many enemies. He was 'not such a hypocrite as to bless them that hate us. Or if a man strike me on the cheek to turn the other – No, *knock* him down, by God!' But they were, as he well knew, making the most of his having demanded a truce, in the papers in England. And he heard that his exertions were to be rewarded with a mere Viscountcy.

'I hope it is not true,' Alexander Davison wrote, 'any distinction short of an Earldom would be degrading.'

He heard that his brother Maurice had been ignored – another insult to himself – but he was past caring. Then Maurice died, Maurice who had written the fateful letter that had started his own career that was ending in so much barren glory. Maurice left a blind wife (at least they thought she was his wife, later it appeared they were mistaken) and Nelson was moved to provide for her.

His physical sufferings were worse than ever. His heart was torturing him. He coughed up 'what everyone thought was my lungs.' If he lived it was only for Emma's letters. His eyes were 'almost stretched out with looking at a point of land where ships come from England.' For a never-to-be-forgotten thirty-seven days he went without any news.

At long last came recall, he was able to leave the

fleet. On July 1st, 1801, he landed at Yarmouth.

He had duly supplied the victory that his country demanded; the Armed Neutrality was disrupted; the Right of Search had been vindicated – rather more than less, since the Freedom of the Seas had only been admitted less rather than more. The precise implications of both phases were left for future generations to settle.

CHAPTER II

THE NARROW SEAS

1801. *July – October*

'Though seas and land betwixt us both,
Our faith and troth,
Like separated souls,
All time and space controls –'
Richard Lovelace.

This time Nelson landed at Yarmouth alone. Ashore, his mind turned to those who were in distress. Yarmouth was full of wounded seamen from the Baltic and it was his first care to call upon them. Then there was Maurice's unofficial 'wife.' He wrote and begged her to stay on at his brother's house 'until Michaelmas' at his own expense and pressed her to keep her 'horse and wiskey, and every other convenience to make your stay comfortable' and sent her £100 to tide over immediate difficulties.

His own wife was suffering also. She was still trying to draw him back to her and away from the Hamiltons. 'I cannot be silent in the general joy,' she wrote. 'No wife ever felt greater affection for a husband than I do. To the best of my knowledge

I have always done everything you desired. If I omitted anything I am sorry for it.' She went on to give him news of his father who had been consistently loyal to her; even, as an anonymous writer took care to tell him, at the risk of estranging his son's affections. 'I will do everything in my power to alleviate his infirmities,' she wrote; 'what more can I do to convince you that I am truly your affectionate wife?'

But for this sufferer, he could find no compassion, and as had always been his plan he went, after a short stay at Lothian's Hotel, straight to the Hamilton's house in Piccadilly.

He was not well and they took him off to Box Hill for a change of air, with his surviving brother, William the Clergyman, his wife and daughter Charlotte. From there they all went in the blaze of a scorching July to the Bush Inn at Staines, where they made holiday together. Sir William was back at his beloved fishing, and insisted on having a barbel cooked for dinner, much to the Admiral's distaste. Emma and Nelson lingered the long evenings away in meadows starred with King cups, and an admirer conveyed his impressions to Emma in fine heroic couplets:

'Ah! lady could we both with happier you
Now form a part of gallant Nelson's crew,
Six sable foaming coursers long ere night,
Had brought us safely to the Bush (Tom White),

There to have witnessed Father Thames' pride,
While Anthony by Cleopatra's side,
While you, I mean, and Henry in a wherry,
Are cheek by jowl afloat there making merry.
* * * * *
Though truth to say I should not vastly like,
To trust my dinner to an uncaught pike.'

But Anthony's stay with Cleopatra was sadly short. Bonaparte was threatening invasion. Flat-bottomed boats were mustering in the channel ports, and nothing could allay public uneasiness in England but that the popular hero should take charge of her defence. Before July was out, Nelson was given the command of a 'Squadron on a Particular Service' – a miscellaneous collection of light craft patrolling the coast between Orfordness in Suffolk and Beachy Head in Sussex. He hoisted his blue flag on the *Unité* frigate, at Sheerness, on July 27th and at once prepared a scheme for the defence of London.

But, true to his maxim that the best of defences entails attack, he found himself within five days 'looking at' Boulogne. There were fifty or sixty boats there and he tried to destroy them with bombshells without 'any effect that he could see.'

He returned to Margate full of the danger threatening beyond the channel and decided to call on the naval volunteers. Accordingly he issued

a proclamation to all Sea Fencibles in stirring terms:

'As there can be no doubt of the intention of the French to attempt the invasion of our country . . . it is necessary that all good men should come forward . . . to oppose the enemy . . . particularly Sea Fencibles, to defend their country afloat where Britain ought to be defended . . . I flatter myself that the seamen will . . . maintain . . . our undoubted right to the sovereignty of the narrow seas on which no Frenchman has yet dared to sail with impunity.'

But out of nearly three thousand Fencibles employed on fishing boats, piers, and merchantmen, less than four hundred responded to his appeal. He saw that he must rely upon his regular sailors and was convinced more than ever that he could be best effective if he 'carried the war from our own doors.'

On August 15th, Boulogne was once more his objective. Seven flat-bottomed boats and fifty ships' boats rowed out for an attack. Their crews were armed with pikes and cutlasses and each boat contained a 'broad axe and combustibles.' The orders were to cut the cables of all the French craft moored outside Boulogne pier while the flat-bottomed boats should cover the operation with their 'eight-inch howitzers.' As soon as a French boat was taken, the next was to be attacked 'until the whole of the flotilla be taken or totally annihilated,' the obstinate boats to be fired, the rest to be towed

away to 'fast sailing cutters,' which were to bring them to England. 'Nelson' was the watchword; 'Bronte' the countersign.

Boulogne, however, was not to be a miniature Nile. As at Teneriffe, his bad luck at boat engagements persisted. A heavy fire of musketry from the beach swept the English boats as they approached the pier; they got alongside the French, but the latter were chained to each other and to the shore. Under a murderous fire the chains could not be severed. The attack was beaten off with a loss of fourty-four killed and a hundred and twenty-eight wounded.

This check was annoying; he had friends among the dead. Back in his frigate moored off the Downs, he began to brood over his troubles. His wretched health, the constant seasickness, and his mental strain, settled the old depression heavily upon him. He wrote to Emma every day. He had asked her to find a country house where he could make his home with them. Something was said about Turnham Green, but he really did not care; Turnham Green would do as well as anywhere. So long as Emma was in the house nothing else mattered. Ten thousand kisses were due to her, he wrote, and he was eagerly waiting for his chance to pay the debt.

His spirits were so low that his old vanity failed him altogether. 'I wish, my dear Emma, that my name was never mentioned by the newspapers;

it may create poor Nelson enemies, not that I care, only that I hate to be praised except by you.' When the town of Harwich turned out to welcome him he declined to land and put off as long as he could the pressing invitation of the Corporation of Sandwich. He found that he hated to be stared at. His mind could dwell on one prospect only – the thought of retiring with Emma to Bronte. 'We shall all meet at Naples or Sicily one of these days.'

In September Emma had a chance to pay him a flying visit. He was wildly excited. He found rooms for her and her husband at the 'Three Kings' at Deal, quiet rooms but for the noise of the surf. A balcony ran in front and they were admirably placed to enable 'my lady to take the benefit of sea bathing.' Three dozen of the best champagne were ordered by the stage wagon, 'or I shall have nothing to give you.'

They brought good news. They had found a house – 'a little farm' at Merton in Surrey. It was just what they wanted, close to London, pleasantly rural, and there was fishing for Sir William in the Wandle which ran through the grounds. It was going cheap in the general wartime slump. Even so the strain on Nelson's finances were heavy. £6,000 went at once as a first payment; the remainder he had to find by borrowing from his friends. Alexander Davison, who was doing very well out of the war as a contractor, came to his assistance. The completion of the purchase 'took every farthing'

Nelson had in the world. The Baltic expedition had cost him £2,000. And in the six weeks he had been in the channel he had spent another £1,000. He was being pestered by charities, beggars, and even blackmailers. Unless his command came to an end and enabled him to repair his finances in retirement, he would be ruined. And yet when Emma returned with Sir William to London, she carried Nelson's full authority to furnish their new home and to make any arrangements she thought fit.

While she was with him, he had walked on air; when she left him he was as depressed as he had ever been. Before the chaise that bore her was across Blackheath, he had sent a letter to 'Mrs. Thompson': –

'I came on board, but no Emma. No, no, my heart will break. I am in silent distraction. The four pictures of Lady H. N. are hung up, but alas! I have lost the original. But we part only to meet very soon again; it must be, it shall be. My dearest wife, how can I bear our separation? Good God, what a change! . . . but better times shall come if it pleases God . . . Love my Horatia and prepare for me the farm . . . May the heavens bless you,' he concluded, 'Amen, Amen, Amen.'

The grey days dragged heavily by. The Equinoctial gales lashed the seas, and cooped up in his tiny cabin he was sick for days together. He seemed to be forgotten by the authorities in London and had

perforce to beat up and down the coast for no apparent reason and with no result. But Emma was working hard. Before September was out she had bought furniture for £1,000. He sent her by the coach 'a little parcel containing the keys of his plate chest and the case of the tea urn,' a china breakfast set, two ladles and two salt cellars 'which will make four of each as two are in the chest,' and instructed her to buy bed linen and send him the bill as usual.

Sir William took all the bustle in the best of humours for at Merton, as at Palermo, he was cast for the rôle of *ex officio* chaperone and it amused him to watch Emma and her mother fitting up pigstyes and hen coops; to see the ducks swimming on the Wandle, and the cock strutting with his hens about the walks. Nelson loved to dwell upon the picture of Emma in such bucolic surroundings. He would rather hear all her little story of a white hen getting into a tree, he told her, 'or hear you call cupidy, cupidy, than any speech I shall hear in Parliament.'

The Wandle, as Sir William told Greville delightedly, contained 'some good perch, roach and dace'; and Nelson had promised to restock the water with fish from the Thames. 'But I bar barbel,' he warned the old man, 'I shall never forget the one you had cooked at Staines.'

September died in a flurry of rain. The new month was big with change. On October 1st, 1801,

the weary war with France came to an end, and amid the cheers of the Londoners shouting for Bonaparte and everybody else, in their anticipation of better times once more, were signed the preliminaries of the Peace of Amiens which at last enabled Nelson to set off for his beloved Merton.

'Thank God it is peace – may the Heavens bless us . . . it rains dreadfully.'

He arrived at the first home of his own that he had ever possessed on October 22nd. They had put up a triumphal arch and there were candles lighted in his honour. But such things meant nothing to him. Merton was only a temporary harbour where he could rest until Sir William's death should free Emma to sail away to Bronte. But it was to be a resting place where 'we will have good wine, good fires, and a hearty welcome for our friends.'

CHAPTER III

PARADISE REGAINED

November 1801 – *May* 1803

'I have heard the song of the blossoms
And the old chant of the sea,
And seen strange lands from under the arched white sails of ships.
But the loveliest things of beauty God ever has shown to me
Are her voice, and her hair, and her eyes, and the dear red curve
of her lips.'

John Masefield.

For his conduct before Copenhagen, the 'right trusty and well-beloved Horatio Baron Nelson' had been duly rewarded. And it was with the 'Name, State, Degree, Style, Dignity, Title and Honour' of Viscount Nelson of the Nile and of Burnham Thorpe that he took his seat in the House of Lords on November 29th, 1801.

He lost no time in airing his views on the state of the world. Ingenuously he launched into strategical geography. Minorca was 'an island of little value to us' (perhaps he remembered that he had refused to leave the Bay of Naples for its relief two years before?) Malta he held to be 'of no conse-

quence to this country' (it had been of slight enough consequence when he was at Palermo a year earlier). He referred to the Cape of Good Hope as 'a tavern to be called at on the voyage to India.' Then, adverting to Political Economy, he averred that the Cape 'could only be maintained at enormous expense' and that 'under the Dutch you could buy a cabbage there for twopence, but that since it had come into our hands we were obliged to pay a shilling.' The Lords listened politely. When the House rose in the evening he drove down to Merton, which took him exactly an hour from Hyde Park Corner.

But even in his suburban paradise he felt the estrangement of the world of affairs. Local celebrities such as Mr. Stinton the grocer, Mr. Halfhide the gentleman farmer, or Mr. Abraham Goldsmid 'the financial gentleman,' might hang breathlessly upon the favour of his patronage and load him with invitations and hampers of game; but the Court, Officialdom, the Nobility, London and Society were inflexible in their enmity. And now to the list was joined even the City.

In his daily paper he read how the Corporation had voted its thanks to the Army and Navy then in Egypt (a force which, after all, had done no more than realise the fruits of his victory at the Nile). But there had been no official mention of the Battle of Copenhagen. Coming in the midst of his social ostracism, this omission seemed a calculated per-

sonal slight. There and then he wrote to the Lord Mayor.

'I have never seen that the smallest services by Navy or Army have missed being always noticed by the great City of London with one exception, I mean, my Lord, the glorious second of April . . . For myself I should bear the stigma but . . . it is my duty to prove to my companions in danger that *I* have not failed to represent their bravery and meritorious services . . .' He was so enraged that he sent copies to St. Vincent at the Admiralty and Mr. Addington the Prime Minister and he refused to dine at the Guildhall.

St. Vincent acknowledged the letter, 'You have judged fit to write to the Lord Mayor,' without comment. The Premier resorted to the evasiveness of the politician.

The city had done no more than anticipate the official attitude to the action in the Baltic. The King's Speech passed over the matter in silence; and the Government decided that it would not strike the usual Victory Medal. Even so, Nelson would not obey these very plain signals to break off action. He told Captain Foley he would never 'wear his other medals till that for Copenhagen was struck.' He refused to accept public thanks for his services in planning the Defence of the Thames. And he insisted on a personal interview with the Prime Minister at Downing Street. Nothing came of it all. There were 'private reasons' he was told.

The 'private reasons' in their final analysis were Fanny. If he had been willing to give up Emma and return to his lawful wife at Arlington Street, the world, its code once formally accepted, would have received him with acclamation. But such terms as these defenders of the 'Three Crowns' battery of the conventions demanded were altogether too high in his eyes and he preferred to keep his flag flying and fight on.

With Fanny he had broken for ever. 'I have done my duty as an honest generous man,' he had said. 'Living, I have done all in my power for you, and if dead you will find I have done the same,' and over the tortured words she wrote: 'This is my Lord Nelson's letter of dismissal.'

Yet once again, as the Christmas festivities of 1801 came near, she was to break upon the course he had ordained at Merton. She was lonely and growing older, and she threw her pride aside. 'The silence you have imposed upon me is more than my affection will allow and in this instance I hope you will forgive me . . . I have now to offer you a warm comfortable house. Do, my dear husband, let us live together. I have but one wish in the world, to please you . . . Let everything be buried in oblivion. It will pass away like a dream.' The letter was returned to her endorsed by Mr. Alexander Davison: 'Opened by mistake by Lord Nelson, but not read.'

According to his lights, Nelson had done his duty

by her as an 'honest generous man.' He had settled upon her an allowance of £1,800 a year, and at a time when his whole income was no more than £3,000. His three 'victories' only brought him grants amounting to £2,000 a year. The purchase of Merton had further strained his tiny fortune and he was so short of money that he was forced to sell some of the diamond boxes that had been presented to him after the Nile.

Life at Merton was extravagant. Emma had long ago forgotten the economies that Greville had so laboriously taught her. She kept open house and generally covers were laid for twelve or fourteen. In an economical week the outgoings were at least £26, comprising £5 6s. 10d. for the fishmonger; £4 8s. 11d. for the grocer; £7 11s. 10½d. for the butcher; and £3 12s. 7d. for vegetables. But an average one was nearer £50; and when the Piccadilly house was open also it often cost as much as £100.

Sir William hated all the entertaining (he was nearly seventy-three). It was only to avoid an explosion, he told Greville, that he submitted to all 'the nonsense.' He took solace in his fishing, varied by an occasional visit to the Royal Society or an auction at Christies. He felt that life was too short to make it worth while to have any more of the 'very silly altercations' that had so often taken place between Emma and himself.

With the old man on one of his visits to London

or tucked away in a backwater, Emma and Nelson, and little Horatia, had their Eden as free as they desired. It was a broad white house, built nearly a hundred years before in the formal Palladian style, with long casements flush with the walls, and stone ornaments on the roof. Before the door, a sweep of gravel was bordered by posts and chains, lit by two lamps on iron posts. The lawn sloped down to the Wandle, spanned by a bridge.

The period dignity of the outside was, however, hardly supported by Emma's taste in decoration and furnishing. On all hands were trophies and mementos of the past glory of the present tenants. All the pictures and cameos that had emanated from the countless painters and *dillettanti* who had been used to frequent the Palazzo Sessa, crowded the walls. There was Emma as Sensibility and Circe and the rest; Emma in every one of her attitudes, with children and tambourines, and without them; Emma, serious, enticing, provoking and reproving. There, too, were copies of all the heroic efforts of the print-sellers. Nelson was to be seen in every victory and in every action, sandwiched among pieces of plate, captured coats of arms, and fragments of enemy ships, even the flagstaff of the luckless *Orient* was there.

Nelson was continually seeing himself and his glory reflected in a looking glass. Nothing could have been better contrived to please his vanity and the more so now that he was being publicly

slighted. And Emma's conversation and behaviour still flattered him as they had done during their sentimental journey and struck aristocratic visitors as 'ridiculous and disgusting.'

In a pathetic way both Emma and Nelson persisted in their pretence that Horatia was only their adopted child and to the end of her life she was under that delusion. Even Lord Minto believed Emma's story that her attachment to Nelson was 'perfectly pure.' Her parents insisted on taking Horatia to church, where Nelson's little niece Charlotte turned over the leaves of their big prayer book while they prayed dutifully for King George, Queen Charlotte, Frederick Prince of Wales, the Princess of Wales and all the Royal Family. In the village he was profuse with his charity, and for years to come in humble homes there was talk of bounty of the celebrated one-armed Admiral and the kindness of his gracious lady friend.

When Emma introduced him as 'our saviour,' he smiled happily like a child and pointed out his busts decked with laurel leaves with unaffected joy to his amused visitors. 'Do you know,' he said solemnly, speaking of his missing arm, 'I can feel the fingers quite distinctly; which you see is a direct proof of the existence of the soul and makes the thing quite clear.' His philosophy of life was still that of a headstrong child. And like a child he met rebuffs social and professional with blind burst of temper. Often after some real or fancied slight he

would fling himself on the sofa, and say, 'I am worn out.'

At the end of April, 1802, there was bad news. His old father, who had hoped to the end for a reconciliation between his son and Fanny, died at his beloved Bath and there were the lawyers and bankers to see about winding up his small estate. The blow told heavily on Nelson and his health suffered. His eye grew worse again. He had a 'stomach and bowel' complaint.

Even the sunny comfortable round of Merton grew chill as the shadow of mortality fell across it. Emma was anxious. She saw that he must be distracted and suggested joining Sir William in a business visit he was about to make to his lands at Milford in Wales. Early in July the three of them set off on a driving tour. Greville, Emma's old flame, Sir William's steward at Milford, was their guide.

Their carriage followed the chalk ridge of the north downs and they stayed for a night among the pines of Box Hill. They then drove down the Thames Valley to Oxford. The City presented Nelson with its freedom in yet another gold box and there were appropriately long Latin speeches in the Sheldonian where he was made a Doctor of Laws *Honoris Causae*. They put up at the 'Star' and their bill came to £27.

While at Oxford, the party made an expedition to Woodstock to pay their respects to the Duke of

Marlborough at Blenheim. But the Churchills, already scrupulously moral, were sticklers for conjugal fidelity and having left a cold collation for his visitors the Duke was not at home. The deliberate insult was calculated to send Emma and Nelson into paroxysms. 'Had I been a Queen you should have had a Principality after the Battle of Aboukir,' she said to Nelson at the top of her voice, 'so that Blenheim should have only been as a kitchen garden to it.' And the Admiral, shedding tears of mortification, swore that he had 'yet more beds of laurel to gather,' and refused so much as to touch the collation.

In a temper they left Oxford with its mixed associations behind and, driving by the fat meadows of the Upper Thames, lumbered over the stone bridge at Eynsham, up the hill at Witney, and down the steep incline to Burford. Thence they pushed on across the Cotswolds to Gloucester. The cathedral bells rang them in. They stayed a short time and made for Ross-on-Wye, whence they took boat to Monmouth.

All along the charming windings of the river the good folk of Herefordshire cheered their passage with the discharge of small-arms and the boat was decked with laurel. The brass band of the Brecon Militia conducted them up from the landing stage and Nelson was hailed a burgess of the Borough.

Then they passed into Wales to Milford. It was August 1st, and all Sir William's tenantry was

there to meet them. There was a rowing match, and there were swings, and roundabouts, and prize pedigree Herefords with coloured rosettes. In the evening there was a dinner at the New Hotel where Nelson, at the top of his form, said that the harbour of Milford (with that of Trincomalee) was the finest he had ever beheld. When at last they drove away they left 'a portrait of Lord Nelson by Leonardo Gozzardi of Palermo' and a guinea for the bell-ringers.

They passed into South Wales, were dragged through Haverfordwest, and received the freedom of Swansea.

At Tenby the whole town trooped after them and it struck at least one of the inhabitants that there was something pathetic in the procession. Emma had swelled considerably, he thought; and Nelson had shrunk. Sir William trotted behind carrying a lap dog. They all were so obviously proud that one knew not whether to laugh or weep.

They came back to England, through a triumphal arch to see the cathedral at Hereford and the Bishop (but the Bishop was ill) and to accept the freedom of a cider making city in an applewood box. They drove the length of the shire, pausing for lunch at Leominster; to get yet another freedom at Ludlow; and went on by orchards hung with apples and plums to Worcester where the welcoming bells were mingled with the hooters at the china factory.

Very tired, they came to Birmingham, 'two hours early to avoid the crowd.' The new factories, spawn of the French Wars, were wearily admired and there was a torchlight procession back to the hotel. At last, on September 5th, they were back at Merton, tired but happy.

Their jaunt had cost exactly £480. According to Emma, the news of it when it came to the ears of the fashionable world would 'burst some of them.'

* * * * *

The leaves were falling along the wooded length of the Surrey Hills when they came back to Paradise Merton, and as the year 1802 died gently in the slightly threatening hush that hung over Europe it seemed as if the world that Emma knew was passing too. They had journeyed far and wide to shake off the cold feel of Death. Now that they were back Death was there waiting for them.

A letter from Sicily brought word that Nelson's factor had lately died at Bronte, and he could never now welcome the master and lady for whom he had toiled to make all ready.

Emma heard, too, that the first of her loves was gone. Willet Payne was no more; and those first kisses of hers were only fast fading memories.

And George Romney had painted his last canvas; after thirty-six years he had come back to his wife to die.

The props of her world were being knocked from

her one by one. Desperately she clung to all that was left. She had known loneliness in her youth; now as she grew older its spectre haunted her again.

Sir William was very old. He could not last much longer. 'Whether I die in Piccadilly or in any other spot in England, 'tis the same to me,' he muttered wearily. He scarcely noticed the new year and the daffodils. And before the primroses were faded on Epsom Downs he died also.

Nelson alone remained; her single shield against that world that had never really forgiven her intrusion. 'Unhappy day for Emma,' she wrote with real understanding. 'Ten minutes past ten dear blessed Sir William left me.'

Tongues wagged freely in the great world. What would Nelson do now? His last screen had been shattered and it would be interesting to see how things would shape at Merton. 'How her Ladyship will manage to live with the hero of the Nile now I am at a loss to know, at least in an honourable way,' Captain Hardy commented sardonically. And enemies took a malicious pleasure in noting that she was left 'worse off than they imagined.'

Flight to Bronte when Sir William died had always been Nelson's avowed aim. But now the chance had come they both hung back. To Emma it would mean an irrevocable break with England and all its joys that in these later years had in spite of everything come to mean so much for her. It meant too, a last surrender to the world that was

snubbing her and an abandonment of her struggle for acceptance and recognition. To Nelson, Bronte spelt exile. It would be a new world and perhaps he was getting a little old – the youthful enthusiasm was waning. And should he go he would never pace another quarter-deck under an English Ensign. So they both hesitated; and even as they drew back, out of the heavy silence that wrapped Europe, came the rhythmic beat of drums.

The two years' peace was ended. Nodding plumes and dusty pipeclay swung down the long roads of Picardy to front the sea winds and the channel spray. The green cliffs at Boulogne vanished beneath a snow of tents. And far out at sea Brixham trawlers heard the faint strains of the Marseillaise.

'I will risk life and reputation to invade this England,' hissed Bonaparte, pounding his desk. And two hundred miles away in Whitehall supercilious gentlemen in faultless cravats considered it 'expedient to adopt additional measures of precaution.'

The wreaths on Sir William's grave were hardly withered before a message from the Admiralty informed Nelson that he had been appointed to the *Victory* as Vice-Admiral of the White to command the Mediterranean Fleet, and on May 6th he came to Emma to say good-bye.

At four o'clock in the morning of the 18th, before the house was awake, he slipped quietly out at the brick battlemented gate on the Wimbledon Road

to a waiting post-chaise. It took the Portsmouth Road. At the first stage, while they changed the horses at Kingston, he wrote hurriedly: –

'Cheer up, my dearest Emma, and be assured that I ever have been, and am, and ever will be, your most faithful and affectionate Nelson and Bronte.'

CHAPTER IV

THE STEADFAST WEB OF GOD

May 1803 – *July* 1805

'And this I know: whether the one true Light,
Kindle to Love, or Wrath consume me quite,
One glimpse of it within the Tavern caught,
Better than in the Temple lost outright.'
Omar Khayyam.

On the camp at Boulogne with its attendant flotilla depended Bonaparte's 'Immense Project' for the subjection of England. He would ferry one hundred thousand men across the Straits of Dover just as eight hundred years before Duke William had taken his host from Normandy to the Sussex coast.

The problem, however, was not so simple as it had been in 1066. To transport a hundred thousand men across the channel in flat-bottomed boats needed not only a calm sea but naval control of the Straits for at least two days.

But Bonaparte's battle fleet was inferior in

numbers and vastly inferior in man-power, and it was scattered along the huge coast line that he controlled.

As soon as war broke out every section of it was blockaded in its port. Keith watched the North Sea; Cornwallis lay off Brest; and Nelson was sent to cover Toulon.

His task was to keep the French fleet in its harbour or, should it slip out, to prevent it from reaching the channel. It was not hard work, for his opponents had neither the men nor the inclination to effect a sortie, but it was monotonous and nerve wracking for a man in his mood and condition.

During eighteen months he only passed three days on shore. His 'cabin smelt of paint' and Emma's picture hanging above his chair, reminded him of their separation. 'My heart is full to bursting! May God Almighty bless and protect you, is the fervent prayer of, my dear beloved Emma, your most faithful affectionate Nelson,' he told her.

He could not sleep, however tired he was, and the depression that had visited him at intervals all his life hung perpetually across his brain. Away from Emma and the distractions of Merton, fearsome visions of the future began to take shape in his imagination. 'There is no happiness in the world,' he wrote to Collingwood. Gradually, its hostility came to assume more sinister proportions. He saw Emma and himself grow older and poorer and lonelier together, despised, rejected, robbed even

of the glory that he had so hardly and so patiently won. 'Let them do what they will,' he told her, 'whether I live or die you will be better off than ever.' But it was as much to reassure himself as to comfort her that he wrote. More and more the conviction grew upon him that the end of everything was drawing nearer, that, as he told Troubridge, 'my career is nearly run.'

And perhaps because of this feeling that his remaining moments with Emma were numbered, his thoughts dwelt constantly upon her. As the *Victory* slid round Cape Minerva he looked upon Capri and its memories came wafted across the sea on the scent of a thousand blossoms. Thoughts of those silver nights by the fountains, of the fishermen's songs coming across from Santa Lucia, of the stars and the ribbons and the fireworks, were more than his loneliness could bear. He gazed upon the picture in his cabin, ran his fingers through the lock of hair she had sent him, wrote to her whenever a boat passed going to England. He sent her every rarity that came his way: gloves, 'made only in Sardinia of the beards of mussels'; a muff, he had heard they were 'very scarce and for that reason I wish you to have one'; and a watch for little Horatia 'to wear when she is good.' 'My soul is God's; let Him dispose of it as it seemeth fit to His infinite wisdom, my body is Emma's.'

Away at Merton she was busy with the small changes that were needed in his house and garden.

A new fence towards Mr. Halfhide's grounds; a post to be changed between the grass and the gravel – a score of minute things that he delighted to direct from the *Victory* even while dictating dispatches from seven until two in the afternoon. And in February, 1804 – nine months after he had driven away on that grey May morning – she bore him a second daughter. She called it Emma.

They were bad days. Horatia took the smallpox in March. She survived; but little Emma grew more sickly and before the hay was carted in the lush Wimbledon fields was laid in Paddington churchyard. All England wore regimentals. Even Mr. Charles James Fox compressed his principles and his figure into the uniform of the Chertsey Volunteers. Plough-horses dragging cannon over Romney Marsh shied at the new martello towers. Stolid militiamen and Fencibles sweated round village greens. Down in Herefordshire an adjutant died from his efforts to 'perfect the military character of his corps.' Rugby boys learnt platoon drill. The air trilled to the fifes of tramping regiments and their marching songs:

'Oh, now I'm bound for Brighton camp,
So may kind Heavens guide me;
And send me safely back again,
To the girl I left behind me.'

* * * * *

On the cliffs at Boulogne, while the sea wind

bellied the cloaks of his marshals, the green-clad cause of it all sat playing his war game with real ships and men. The concentration of an overwhelming force at the crucial time and place had made him the greatest general since Alexander. Well-trained troops manoeuvring at mechanical speed with clockwork precision had enabled him time and again to rout the best armies in Europe. Now, at another board, and on another element, he trusted to the same master move. The channel was England's crucial point, and there by the mechanical speed and clockwork precision of his ships must be concentrated an overwhelming fleet to enable him to send his invading army over the water.

The ships at Toulon and the ships at Rochefort were to be the striking force. They were both ordered to slip their blockades with the first favourable wind, join forces in the West Indies, smash up the English sugar trade, sail back to France, release the Brest fleet, and so concentrate in the channel the superior force that was needed.

While at Toulon and Rochefort all was astir for the great dash, the year 1804 swung to its fevered close. To the jangle of bells in Notre Dame Bonaparte, in a cloud of incense, rose to crown himself Emperor of the French. At the Mayor's Ball at Norwich, Emma drank his Worship's health with a *three times three*. (She was in better humour – laughing over 'Tom Tit's' behaviour at Bath. 'As stiff as a poker,' they said she was, and a

neighbour peeping through the shutters had seen her slip from her Sedan chair, take half-a-dozen steps, turn round, and get in again). Nelson was coughing in his cabin. He found it strangely hard to read the documents they set before him and feared terribly for his remaining eye. It was as hard to write as to read and fevers wracked him to the bone. From Spain came a Declaration of War that gave Bonaparte yet another fleet and command of Europe's sea coast from Venice to the Elbe.

The Rochefort fleet slipped its blockade in January, 1805, and reached its rendezvous at Martinique; but at Toulon, Villeneuve made a false start and put back for repairs. The Rochefort fleet was too weak alone. It waited for him in vain and returned to Rochefort in May.

But in March Villeneuve had started again. While Nelson was watering his fleet in Sardinia his quarry slipped out and passed through the Straits of Gibraltar in safety. Four days later, on April 4th, a frigate brought Nelson the news. The French had gone. But where they had gone was another matter. For a feverish fortnight he scoured the Mediterranean.

'My good fortune seems flown away,' he said. Not until April 18th did he learn that Villeneuve was clear of the Straits. The French fleet had collected some Spanish ships from Cadiz and it was Nelson's conviction that it was bound on an invasion of Ireland or a concentration off Brest.

He sailed to Gibraltar but the winds held him up. 'I am not made to despair,' he cried, although he was bitterly disappointed and almost mad with rage. 'God knows what I have suffered at not getting at the enemy's fleet.' In London there was a panic: the Immense Project was working.

At last, on May 9th, a British officer in the Portuguese service came on board the *Victory*. He brought definite information. Villeneuve had been sighted making for the West Indies. He had gained a month's start. Nelson was called upon to make an instant decision and he decided on pursuit. 'My lot is cast,' he exclaimed, 'I am going to the West Indies. I must hope for the best.'

On June 8th, Villeneuve at Martinique was aghast to learn that Nelson was at Barbados. The Allied Fleet turned back for Europe. Nelson followed. He was now only five days behind. By June 17th only fifty hours sailing separated them.

Nelson considered that they were making for the Mediterranean and that he must make all speed to get there first. On July 20th he reached Gibraltar. He had saved the Indies; but Villeneuve had escaped him.

Meanwhile, the frightened Allies were off Ferrol where, on July 22nd, they were intercepted by an English squadron. Shattered, leaking, and disorganised, they put into Ferrol. The 'Immense Project' had miscarried; and England breathed again.

CHAPTER V

ENGLAND EXPECTS

1805. *August – October*

'A la tres chère – à la tres belle,
Qui remplit mon coeur de clarté,
A l'ange, à l'idole immortelle,
Salut en immortalité.'

Charles Baudelaire.

By the last week in August, 1805, the threat of invasion was over. The French striking force, worn out and shaken, was once more penned up in harbour; Bonaparte's cavalry were riding back along the dusty roads that led from the sea. Eastward, new enemies were blundering forward under the older imperial eagles. Mack was in Bavaria. The Czar was coming down through Poland. France had no choice but to look landwards again.

At sea, the war paused and in the lull the *Victory* came sailing down the Solent. Nelson went ashore and down the old familar road over the heather to London. This time he carried the weight of many responsibilities. He was needed in Whitehall.

Lord Sidmouth and Lord Castlereagh and young Mr. Canning wanted to know what had happened in the Indies and whether the French fleet could be brought to action.

He addressed them with all his old keenness and energy. 'Rodney broke the enemy's line in one place, I will break it in two,' he said, drawing his finger across the polish of Sidmouth's table. 'I have adopted a new motto, "Touch and Take!" '

Young Colonel Sir Arthur Wellesley, just back from India, was amazed at the self-confidence of his conversation – 'if I can call it conversation, for it was almost all on his side.'

But as soon as they would let him go, Nelson was back at Merton. Summer was just on the turn and by the Wandle the water-meadows held all the soft brilliance of Surrey. He could not look out often enough on the big tufted elms, the still ornamental canals, and the pale avenue of lime trees in the gardens. Emma had finished the alterations and it was surprising to see how the place was improved.

To every moment of those few days that he could spend with her he clung with an insistence that yet held something of despair. With his love on his arm, their child at his side, he wandered up and down the walk he called his quarter-deck. When she asked if he was happy, he smiled. 'I am as happy as possible, and I would not give sixpence to call the King my uncle,' he said.

His family all came to stay with him and steadfastly refusing other invitations he dined every night at home with them, Emma presiding at the head of the table, old Mrs. Cadogan nodding like a benevolent chaperon at the foot.

The days followed each other in a placid round. Emma was gentle and quiet. She seemed to have lost her old raucousness and to have grown unusually tender. They all understood him. War was very far away. For three weeks he seemed to forget Villeneuve, his money troubles, his failing sight, his ill health, the slights of society.

Outwardly content, he played his part; but he could see the great loneliness in which they moved. The King had ignored him again; society was still adamant; Fanny reproached him by her very existence; and the Whigs had not forgotten Caracciolo. For his own part it mattered little; but it hurt him that Emma should suffer – and he thought of Horatia's future.

* * * * *

Just as it was getting light one morning early in September, a naval officer knocked on the garden gate. Nelson was already up and dressed when the visitor was shown in.

'Good morning, Blackwood. I am sure you bring me news of the French and Spanish fleets,' the Admiral greeted him.

Captain the Honourable Henry Blackwood explained. He was bringing important dispatches

to the Admiralty. Villeneuve had refitted at Ferrol. Now he had gone to Cadiz and had joined the Spaniards. He (Blackwood) had dropped in to tell Nelson on his way to the Admiralty.

Nelson heard it eagerly. 'Depend on it, Blackwood,' he said, 'I shall yet give M. Villeneuve a drubbing.'

It meant that the lull was over and that he must go. The white house at Merton began to fill with the bustle of departure. His sea trunks were forwarded by the stage wagon to Portsmouth. He made last arrangements with Alexander Davison to cover the debts of his brother's widow and to put his own affairs in order.

'I am again heartbroken,' declared Emma, 'as our dear Nelson is immediately going.' To her it seemed as if the last three weeks had been all a dream and she had just woken up to all the misery of reality, she said.

On September 12th she went with him to Carlton House at the command of the Prince of Wales. Nelson had always despised the Prince and the Prince was only concerned with annoying the old King. But politeness was incumbent, even if it wasted one of their last days together. It was five o'clock before they got back to Merton.

At dinner that night Emma hardly drank and ate anything and, although there was company present she seemed to be in a swoon from which she would rouse herself only to insist with a strange

pathos upon the purity and sincerity of her love. A strange shadow was falling over the household.

The next day was a Friday and the 13th of the month. Nelson had planned to be at Portsmouth by the 14th. He stayed with Emma as the minutes ticked away, postponing until the last possible moment their final parting. At ten o'clock at night the time came. He went up to Horatia's bedroom to say good-bye. The child was asleep and he knelt down for a few seconds at her bedside.

Downstairs his great-coat and sword were being put into the post-chaise. His trunk was handed up. Emma was in tears. He patted her shoulder as he stepped in. 'Brave Emma,' he said; 'if there were more Emmas there would be more Nelsons . . .'

* * * * *

'Friday night, at half-past ten, drove from dear, dear Merton, where I left all that I hold dear in this world, to go and serve my King and country. May the great God whom I adore enable me to fulfil the expectations of my country, and if it is His good pleasure that I should return, my thanks will never cease being offered up to the throne of His mercy. If it is His good providence to cut short my days upon earth, I bow with the greatest submission, relying that He will protect those so dear to me that I leave behind. His will be done. Amen. Amen. Amen.'

At six o'clock on the morning of the 14th, he drove under the dark archway of the George Inn at

Portsmouth. The town knew of his coming and all down the curve of the High Street the crowd surged expectantly. He was tired and wanted to rest and they showed him to No. 15 bedroom. For hours he lay fully dressed under the chintz hangings of the four-poster. At last they led him by a backstair way to the coachyard. At two o'clock he took boat among the bathing machines on the beach to escape a demonstration. But he had been anticipated.

A press of men and women thronged down to the water's edge, pushing forward to take his hand, weeping and cheering hysterically. There were odd rumours in the air. A battle was certain. Would he come back? Some said he never intended to come back. His weak health, his failing eye were known. The effect upon him of his boycott was guessed. Word passed round that he had been to see the coffin given to him after the Nile and that he had said 'I think it highly probable that I may want it on my return.' He had said, too, 'I shall outdo my former achievements, but I shall not return to enjoy the glories I acquire.' They wished him good-bye with the sadness of people not expecting to see him again.

'I had their huzzas before, I have their hearts now,' he said.

His youngest sister had come to see him off. In her mind, also, there was misgiving. 'Oh Kathy; that gipsy,' he said quietly.

* * * * *

Off Cadiz, a fortnight later, the fleet received him with wild enthusiasm. When the Captains assembled in the great cabin of the *Victory* beneath Emma's picture he spoke of his plan as he had done to Sidmouth. Here and here he would break the line; ship by ship they were to be 'touched and taken.' It was new – it was singular – it was simple. 'This must succeed, if only we can get at them,' they said.

Back on their ships his Captains testified their regard for him by painting the hulls in the colours of his choice: black sides, the yellow bands marking the gun decks broken into a chequer by the black painted gunports.

In Cadiz was Villeneuve with the Allied Fleet. His orders were to fight his way out and get to Cartegena. But to judge when it was best to obey them he must know the strength of Nelson's squadron and this Nelson took good care that he should not. Only a few frigates kept in sight of Cadiz. With the main body he stood fifty miles out at sea with a chain of ships between himself and the inner line of the blockade.

At seven o'clock on the morning of Saturday the 19th October a signal from the inner frigates passed down the English line: 'Enemy's ships are coming out of port.' Thirty-three line of battle ships, five frigates and two brigs were putting out from Cadiz harbour. That night both English and Allied Fleets lay becalmed. But next day – Sunday –

the whole Allied Fleet got out to sea and Nelson moved towards the African coast to bar their passage through the Straits. Through the night the twinkling of blue lights to the North-East, the fiery trail of an occasional rocket and the reports of distant signal guns from the English look-out frigates marked the whereabouts of the enemy fleet.

Daylight on Monday morning, the 21st, found the two fleets in sight of each other about eleven miles apart. It was a grey cloudy morning with a heavy westward swell on the sea. Far off, the hazy outline of Cape Trafalgar was dark against the morning sky.

Nelson came up on deck with the daylight. With the quiet deliberation of a man whose mind is made up he ordered the fleet to steer towards the enemy. On the *Victory* there was the steady bustle that preceded action. Chests were bumped down into the hold, a thousand shot were brought in hammocks to every gun-deck, wet sand was sprinkling over the planking, pumps and hoses were made ready. The ship's carpenters entered the officers' cabins and knocked out the wooden screens and partitions. Emma's picture was carefully taken down.

'Take care of my guardian angel,' said the Admiral to the man who carried it.

At seven o'clock Nelson signalled for Blackwood to come aboard. Then he went down again to his stripped cabin, took pen and ink and wrote:

'Codicil to Lord Nelson's Will.'

'October the twenty-first, one thousand eight hundred and five, then in sight of the combined fleets of France and Spain, distant about ten miles.

'Whereas the eminent services of Emma Hamilton, widow of the Right Honourable Sir William Hamilton, have been of the very greatest service to our King and country, to my knowledge, without her receiving any reward from either our King or country . . . the British fleet, under my command, could never have returned the second time to Egypt, had not Lady Hamilton's influence with the Queen of Naples, caused letters to be wrote to the Governor of Syracuse, that he was to encourage the fleet being supplied with everything, should they put into any port in Sicily. We put into Syracuse, and received every supply, went to Egypt, and destroyed the French Fleet. Could I have rewarded these services, I would not now call upon my country; but as that has not been in my power, I leave Emma, Lady Hamilton, therefore, a legacy to my King and country, that they will give her an ample provision to maintain her rank in life. I also leave to the beneficence of my country, my adopted daughter, Horatia Nelson Thompson; and I desire she will use, in future, the name of Nelson only. These are the only favours I ask of my King and country, at this moment, when I am going to fight their battle. May God bless my King and country, and all those who I

hold dear. My relations, it is needless to mention, they will, of course, be amply provided for.

'Nelson and Bronte.'

Meanwhile, Blackwood had arrived and Nelson immediately asked him and Hardy, now Captain of the *Victory*, to witness the codicil. On the writing table were two other letters, unsealed, one to Emma, one to Horatia:

'My dearest beloved Emma, the dear friend of my bosom . . . May the God of battles crown my endeavours with success; at all events I will take care that my name shall ever be most dear to you and Horatia, both of whom I love as much as my own life . . . May Heaven bless you, prays your Nelson and Bronte.'

To Horatia he sent his blessing.

The happiness of Emma and Horatia, the imminence of his own death: these two thoughts dominated his mind as he sat before the papers with Blackwood and Hardy at his elbow. And it seemed as if in some mysterious fashion they were linked together. Apart from Emma and Horatia, he had nothing left to live for; he was going blind, his body was tortured by illness, his King had slighted him, and the established order had rejected him. His victories had not brought the thing he most desired – his world had not accepted his Emma. They would not do it, even for his sake while he lived; but it would be hard for England

to deny his wishes if he died victorious. 'I leave Emma a legacy to my King and country,' he had written. He had decided.

The drum was beating sharply to quarters and the rhythm of the old familiar air went throbbing through the ship:

'Hearts of oak are our ships,
Hearts of oak are our men . . .
We'll fight and we'll conquer
Again and again!'

From the quarter-deck they could see the panorama of battle. For five miles the forty ships of their enemy stretched in a slight curve directly across their own track. In two columns the English were bearing down on them. Seventeen ships were led on by the *Victory* to the left; Collingwood, in the *Royal Sovereign*, sailed at the head of fourteen more to the right.

'What would you consider a victory, Blackwood?' Nelson asked, as they stood together.

'Seeing the handsome way that the battle is offered, I think that if fourteen ships are captured it will be a glorious result.'

'I shall not be satisfied with anything less than twenty,' Nelson replied.

Then Blackwood spoke his fears. With the *Victory* leading the line, with Nelson conspicuous on her quarter-deck, the danger to the Admiral's life was obvious.

'At that critical moment I ventured to remind his Lordship of the value of such a life as his . . . I proposed hoisting his flag in the *Euryalus*, where he could see better what was going on. But he would not hear of it.'

Nelson had told his brother that he knew the enemy would make a 'special set' at the *Victory*. By putting her at the head of the line he was giving them every chance to do so. And Blackwood spoke urgently of allowing another ship to lead. It was Hardy's opinion, too.

But Nelson was inflexible. He would not go aboard another vessel, as Villeneuve was doing, as he himself had done at Copenhagen; and he would not allow any other ship to displace the *Victory* from the post of greatest danger. He had decided.

It was eleven o'clock. The men were taking their grog. The Admiral, firm in his purpose, went down again to his cabin. Once more, and this time on his knees, he took up his pen:

'May the great God whom I worship grant to my country . . . a great and glorious victory . . . for myself individually I commit my life to Him who made me and may His blessing light upon my endeavours for serving my country faithfully. To Him I resign myself and the just cause which is entrusted to me to defend. Amen. Amen. Amen.'

Outside, Dr. Scott, the chaplain, and Mr. Scott, the Admiral's secretary, were discussing the danger Nelson was so clearly courting. Even

his clothes invited every French bullet. He was wearing a blue frock coat which bore the four stars of his orders sewn upon it. They were bright and distinct: a perfect mark, a clear guide, to the identity of the wearer. Everyone knew, too, that the French did not scruple to place sharpshooters in their tops.

The ship's doctor, Beatty, was insistent that Nelson must be stopped from exposing himself in this way. He suggested that the stars could be covered by a great coat or even by a handkerchief.

Dr. Scott thought it would be useless to approach the Admiral in his present humour. 'I would not be the man to mention such a matter to him,' he said.

But Beatty persisted; and mentioned the danger tactfully when the Admiral came up from his cabin. 'I was never afraid of my honour'; and he went on to the poop. He had decided.

'I'll amuse the fleet with a signal,' he said to Blackwood, 'don't you think one is wanting?'

'The fleet seem to understand what they are about fairly clearly, my Lord.'

Nelson mused for a moment. Then he said:

'Suppose we telegraph "Nelson confides that every man will do his duty"?'

'Would it not be better, my Lord, to say "England confides"?'

'Certainly, certainly,' burst out Nelson rapturously. And turning to the signal officer, said:

'Mr. Pasco, I wish to say to the fleet, "England confides that every man will do his duty." You must be quick for I have one more to make which is for "Close Action".'

'If your Lordship will permit me to substitute "expects" for "confides," the signal will be sooner completed. "Expects" is in the vocabulary; "confides" must be spelt.'

'That will do, Pasco,' replied Nelson; 'make it directly.'

The string of coloured flags fluttered to the mizzen mast: 'ENGLAND EXPECTS THAT EVERY MAN WILL DO HIS DUTY,' and, down the line, as the meaning of the words came to the stripped gun-crews lashing their black kerchiefs around their heads, there floated back over the heavy waters the sound of muffled cheering.

'Now I can do no more,' said Nelson; 'hoist No. 16 (Close Action) and keep it up.'

He turned to Blackwood and told him to return to his ship and as that officer took his hand, he said:

'I trust, my Lord, that on my return to the *Victory* I shall find your Lordship well.'

Then, for the only time that day, Nelson spoke frankly:

'God bless you, Blackwood,' he said, 'I shall never speak to you again.'

* * * * *

At noon, Collingwood at the head of his column in the *Royal Sovereign* came under the enemy's fire

as he broke through the line of Villeneuve's ships.

The *Victory*, and the column she led, still forged slowly on at two miles an hour upon the heaving water. At a quarter-past twelve, a shot passed through one of her sails. Then, as she continued to ride slowly forward, the concentrated fire of seven or eight ships raked her, riddling the sails, shattering booms and spars, checking her forward course; but she still drifted heavily forward.

Mr. Scott, the Admiral's secretary, was struck by a round shot and killed as he talked to Captain Hardy.

A quarter of a mile away from the enemy she lost her mizzen top-mast. Her wheel was shot away. Eight marines drawn up on the poop were killed by a single shot. A ball threw up a shower of splinters around Nelson and Hardy and tore the buckle of the Captain's shoe.

'This is too warm work, Hardy, to last long,' said Nelson with a smile.

And now it was one o'clock. Through a cloud of heavy smoke the *Victory* surged into the French line, her bows passing ten yards behind the *Bucentaure*, her yards grazing the Frenchman's rigging. As she went by her broadside, double and treble shotted, crashed into the enemy's stern and on to the great *Holy Trinity* behind her. Clouds of thick black smoke filled the air and the dust of wood splinters covered Nelson and Hardy. On the

French ship twenty guns were dismounted and four hundred had been killed and wounded.

The *Victory* swept forward, turned her head, came up alongside the *Redoutable*. The two ships locked together drifted on and Nelson watched as they battered one another. The *Victory* guns overwhelmed those on the *Redoutable*; but the French small arm men in her tops continued to pick off man after man.

And all the while Nelson – conspicuous in his stars – paced steadily up and down the quarter-deck, on the side towards the enemy, in full sight of the French tops only fifteen yards away. Even a young midshipman declared 'he couldn't help being observed by them.'

At a quarter-past one, the inevitable happened. As Hardy was turning in his stride, he saw Nelson fall. 'They have done for me at last; my back-bone is shot through.'

* * * * *

They carried him down to the cockpit. And at last he covered the decorations with a handkerchief – lest his men should know he was struck. Forty more men had just been brought down. It was like a 'butcher's shambles' down there.

They took his clothes off, put a sheet over him, laid him on a pallet, propped him up against a rib of the ship and held him to ease his position. They fanned him. They brought him lemonade.

'Who is that?' said Nelson. It was very dark down

there, only two candles, dim in their lanthorns broke the blackness . . . .

'Ah, Mr. Beatty, you can do nothing for me, I have but a short time to live; my back is shot through. How prophetic you were,' he added, his mind upon his decorations.

'Doctor, I told you so,' he repeated, this time to Scott. 'Doctor, I am gone.'

'I have to leave Lady Hamilton and Horatia to my country. Remember me to Lady Hamilton. Remember me to Horatia . . . Tell Mr. Rose I made a will . . . left Lady Hamilton and Horatia to my country . . . mind what I say.'

He was in agony and could hardly breathe. He felt 'a gush of blood every minute within his breast.' There was no feeling below his waist. 'I – felt – it – break – my – back,' he gasped.

Overhead the crash of the guns went on. Two sharpshooters were in the top whence Nelson had been struck. As he was carried below the Quartermaster pointed them out to Pollard, a sixteen year old midshipman, who picked them both off. One by one the French and Spanish ships were striking their colours and as each foreign flag fluttered down the English cheers filtered down to the cockpit and were taken up by the wounded as they lay there.

Still Nelson continued to call feebly through the darkness 'drink – drink,' ' fan – fan.' He had asked for Hardy.

'Will nobody bring Hardy to me? He must be killed; he is surely destroyed.'

Someone told him that the enemy were decisively beaten, that he hoped his Lordship would bear the tidings to his country.

'It is nonsense to suppose I can live; it is all over,' he repeated.

When Hardy came at last, he wanted news of the battle.

'How goes the day with us?' he asked.

'Very well, my Lord, fourteen of the enemy's ships in our possession . . . .'

'I hope none of *our* ships have struck, Hardy?'

'No, my Lord, no fear of that.'

'I am a dead man, Hardy. I am going fast; it will all be over with me soon. Come nearer to me. Pray let my dear Lady Hamilton have my hair, and all other things belonging to me.'

At three o'clock, when the firing had died down, Hardy came down again. Fourteen ships had surrendered.

'I bargained for twenty. Anchor, Hardy, anchor.'

The Captain hesitated.

'I suppose, my Lord, Admiral Collingwood will now take upon himself the direction of affairs?'

The small figure propped up on the floor made a feeble effort to rise and a flash of his real self came back:

'Not while I live, Hardy; no, do *you* anchor.'

'And shall we make the signal, sir?'

'Yes. While I live *I* anchor.'

He fell back exhausted. When he next spoke they could hardly hear him:

'Don't throw me overboard, Hardy.'

'Oh, no; certainly not.'

'You know what to do. Take care of dear Lady Hamilton, Hardy . . . poor Lady Hamilton . . . kiss me Hardy . . . I wish I had not left the deck . . . I have not been a *great* sinner . . . Remember that I leave Lady Hamilton and my daughter Horatia as a legacy to my country . . . never forget Horatia . . . drink, drink . . . fan, fan . . . rub, rub . . . Thank God I have done my duty . . .'

CHAPTER VI

ENGLAND NEGLECTS

'O frankly fickle and fickly true,
Do you know what the days will do to you?
To your Love and you what the days will do,
O frankly fickle and fickly true?'
Francis Thompson.

ENGLAND was safe; and in the consciousness of her security she opened the floodgates of romanticism. Countless versifiers expressed their country's complacent evangelism in indifferent prosody (and always with a judicious suppression of unpalatable facts):

'Once more the chosen instrument of good,
Fixed on the waves, and 'stablished on the flood,
His country's rights; but sealed them with his blood.
O price his conquering country grieved to pay!
O dear bought glories of Trafalgar's Day!'

Innumerable odes, monodys, elegies, dirges, tributes and laments buried Nelson beneath a tumulus of platitude. The shop windows filled with weeping Britannias clasping funereal urns, doleful lions gazing at tattered Union Jacks, and

anaemic Nelsons exhorting rubicund mariners to do their duty.

His body, carefully preserved in a cask of spirit, was brought up the river to Greenwich. All the vessels in the Thames hoisted colours half-mast high, bells were tolled afloat and ashore, and from Tilbury Fort came the mournful prolonged thunder of minute guns.

The painted chamber had been fitted up with a canopy of black cloth, festooned with various suitable devices in gold, the stem of the *St. Josef*, Nelson's arms, the chelengh, his coronet, the motto '*Tria juncta in uno*' (a reference to his victories – not to the Hamilton *menage*). Here he was laid, resting in the coffin made from *L'Orient's* mainmast, which was enclosed in a sarcophagus, 'considered the most elegant and superb ever seen in Europe, the production of Mr. France, undertaker, of Pall Mall.' On the top of it was balanced Nelson's coronet, on a black cushion, resting on a pall of black velvet lined with white satin. At the head of this sombre catafalque sat Dr. Scott, the chaplain, 'in an elbow chair, in his cassock, unpowdered'; at the foot was a pedestal covered with gilt shields, gauntlets and chelenghs.

After three days, the body was taken down the river. Four fifes and drums played the Dead March in Saul, five hundred Greenwich Pensioners, twelve trumpeters sounding the One Hundredth and Fourth Psalm, three Admirals, six Vice-

Admirals, ten Captains, twenty Lieutenants, and two Chaplains bore him company. The coffin was placed on the State Barge in which Charles II had so often taken Lady Castlemaine to feed the swans at Hampton Court, all green and white and gold, with ten scarlet oars. Then, accompanied by the Lord Mayor of London, the Corporation, and all the Admirals and Captains and Lieutenants in their several barges, it moved up river to Whitehall Stairs, whence it was borne to the Admiralty.

Next day, January 9th, 1806, an interminable procession wound up the crowded Strand to St. Paul's. A detachment of light dragoons, four regiments of foot, six squadrons of cavalry, eleven pieces of cannon and four companies of grenadiers led the way, their bands playing Handel's Dead March.

Then came Pensioners and seamen from the *Victory*, 'with black neckerchiefs and stockings, and crêpe in their hands,' carrying the *Victory's* flag torn and blood-stained.

The Heralds in their carriages, deputations from the City Companies, Knights Bachelors, Gentlemen Ushers, Knights of the Bath, three Honourables (younger sons of Barons), four Privy Councillors, six more Honourables (sons of Earls and Viscounts respectively), ten Barons, two younger sons of Marquises, eight younger sons of Earls, five Viscounts, the younger son of a Duke, the eldest son of a Marquis, fifteen Earls, three Marquises, four

Dukes, the Archbishop of Canterbury, six Dukes of the Blood Royal, and his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales followed all in their several ranks and stations. Mr. Alexander Davison was there with a white staff, and Mr. Charles James Fox, who thought Nelson 'a good man at bottom though his conduct at Naples was atrocious,' and Lord Fitzharris, who had been disgusted at Vienna, and Lord Castlereagh, his Majesty's Secretary of State.

Last came all that was left of the man they had killed, under the six sable plumes of a canopy, drawn by six led horses, and escorted by ten Admirals.

At St. Paul's, clergy and choristers were waiting, over a hundred of them. They sang anthems and psalms, they intoned the prayers, they knelt, they stood up. And precisely at 'thirty-three minutes and a half past five o'clock,' they lowered Horatio Nelson into his grave. A chorister sang 'His Body is Buried in Peace'; the choir responded 'But His Name Liveth for Evermore'; and the congregation went home to dinner.

* * * * *

But the Nation's sentiment was by no means exhausted. Mr. Flaxman was commissioned to execute a grand tomb and on it Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Esquire, M.P., wrote a verbose inscription. Monuments sprang up at Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dublin, Liverpool, Birmingham, Norwich, Bristol and Yarmouth.

'Rear high the monumental stone –
To other days as to his own
Belong the hero's deathless deeds,
Who greatly lives, who bravely bleeds.'

Alive, Nelson had always lacked sufficient money. Now that he was dead, the national purse was wide open for his brother. The Reverend William Nelson was made an Earl with a pension of Five Thousand Pounds *per annum* and a gift of One Hundred and Twenty Thousand Pounds in money.

For Emma they did – nothing.

Every wish that their posthumous hero had not expressed was lavishly granted; his one desire was ignored.

* * * * *

Emma lived on. For six years more she fought a losing battle against a world that gloated over her anguish. The Reverend Earl held back the codicil; and even stinted that little to which she was entitled. Society sneered; the cartoonists caricatured her attitudes. Her creditors swallowed Merton and took from her all that she had left, even Nelson's sword of honour, even the christening mug that he had given to little Horatia.

At the end of June, 1814, she embarked at Tower Bridge with Horatia for the Kingdom of France.

They lodged in Calais in the Rue Français. It was a tumble-down place and they shared only a

garret. The winter was a hard one and it seemed scarcely likely that Emma would see it through.

'If my dear Horatia were provided for,' she wrote, 'I should dye happy and if I could only now be enabled to make her more comfortable and finish her education . . . And think of the situation of Nelson's child . . . .'

She had the dropsy and could not stir from the house. Little Horatia used to fetch scraps of dog's meat from a friendly butcher. Often she asked the poor dull woman whose child she really was, and always Emma, still loyal to the little figure lying in the cold crypt of St. Paul's, shook a heavy tired head. 'My broken heart does not leave me,' she said weakly, and Horatia could learn nothing more.

When the New Year came, Emma was hardly conscious of anything, and lay on her bed clasping a crucifix, until at last, at midday on January 15th, the hopeless struggle ended.

They buried her in a cheerless cemetery at Calais, which later became a timber yard.

The inscription on her headstone soon became illegible, and the last that was seen of it ran:

'. . . . Quae,
. . . . Calesiae,
Via in Gallica vocata,
Et in domo cvi obiit,
Die XV Mansis Januarii A.D. MDCCCXV.
Ætatis suae LI.'

* * * * *

On October 21st, 1844 – the thirty-ninth anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar – Queen Victoria 'on her visit to Portsmouth passed near the *Victory*, and noticing that she was decorated with her flags enquired the cause; and on being informed immediately expressed her intention of going on board. . . .

'On being shown the spot where Nelson received his death wound, her Majesty read aloud the affecting inscription: "Here Nelson fell," and plucked from the wreath of laurel in which it was enshrined two of its leaves and carefully treasured them as a precious memento of the hero.

'Her Majesty then went over to . . . where over the steering wheel is inscribed in letters of gold the words of the memorable signal "England Expects Every Man will do His Duty." . . . With marked emphasis, her Majesty repeated the words. . . .

'Her Majesty and Prince Albert looked around from the poop for a few moments and then the Queen desired to be shown where Nelson died. The Royal Party proceeded to the cabin, in which the very spot is marked by a funeral urn (in paint) surmounted by Nelson's flag and on its top, encircled in a wreath, the words "Here Nelson died."...

'There was a pause here for several minutes and it was remarked that her Majesty was again much affected by the reflections which such a scene awakened.'

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